THE RING AND THE BOOK

AN INTERPRETATION

FRANCIS BICKFORD HORNBROOKE, D.D.

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Francis B. Hornbrook

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BY ROBERT BROWNING

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To

ANN FRANCES BURR

FOR MANY YEARS THE FAITHFUL AND LOYAL FRIEND OF

THE AUTHOR AND HIS WIFE

THIS BOOK

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

FOREWORD

FRANCIS BICKFORD HORNBROOKE was born in Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia), May 7, 1849. He was just thirty-seven years younger than Robert Browning, and was always pleased that his birthday fell on the same day as that of the great poet he loved and studied so many years.

He was of mixed ancestry, being of Dutch and English extraction on his father's side and, on his mother's, of German and Scotch-Irish. The name is Dutch, and tradition says that the family came from the little town of Brœck near Amsterdam. He was the only child of Thomas Bickford and Jane (Lopeman) Hornbrooke, and was named indirectly for Sir Francis Burdett, the great English radical and a distant kinsman of the Hornbrooke family. He was most patriotically and intensely American, though he was only of the first generation in this country, his father having been born in Bristol, England. His far-off ancestor went from Holland to England in 1688 with William of Orange. William the Silent was one of his great heroes and he recalled

with pride and pleasure that his ancestors undoubtedly fought on the dykes of Holland for the great Father of his Country.

Dr. Hornbrooke's father died when his son was in his infancy. The boy was educated in the public schools of Wheeling and took his college course in the Ohio University at Athens, Ohio, graduating in 1870. Getting a college education was no easy matter for the fatherless boy, who early showed a love of reading and study that amounted to a passion. To get the means for his college course he did all sorts of work in vacations and odd times, shrinking from nothing however hard and disagreeable if it would further his cherished ambition. He early decided to go into the ministry and was graduated at Union Theological Seminary, New York, and later at Harvard Divinity School.

He was married in 1874 to Orinda Althea Dudley, a direct descendant of Thomas Dudley, the second colonial governor of Massachusetts. They had two sons who with the wife survive him.

He had three parishes. The first was that of the Union Congregational (Trinitarian) Church in East Hampton, Connecticut. While there he decided that his theological views were more in sympathy with the Unitarian than with the Or-

thodox faith, and left to take the pastorate of the First Parish (Unitarian) Church in Weston, Massachusetts.

It was during his country pastorates that he made that close study of the works of Frederick W. Robertson, Cardinal Newman, and of the early Fathers of the Church for which he was afterwards noted. Dr. C. C. Everett of Harvard University urged him to write a book on church history, but the time of leisure for such a work never came and his knowledge of the subject went into his sermons and various papers. He devoted himself with such conscientious fidelity to the especial interests of his parishes, never for a moment neglecting any duty as a pastor for even his beloved literary studies, that only untiring industry allowed him time for anything else.

After three years of service in Weston he accepted a call to the Channing Church in the neighboring city of Newton, for which he labored for twenty-one years, refusing calls to some of the largest churches in the Unitarian body.

During his pastorate, and greatly by his efforts, the present beautiful church edifice was erected.

During the last fifteen years of his life he was a constant lecturer on literary subjects, giving courses of lectures on Tolstoi, Tennyson, Shakespeare, Browning, and many others. These he

made so interesting that one busy business man said to another, "What is the use in the little time we have of trying to read books? Dr. Hornbrooke gives us the cream of literature with no bother to ourselves." He was a learned and exact biblical student, an eloquent and winning preacher, and an ardent and loving student of the best literature. His Greek Testament and his Browning were constant companions.

He greatly enjoyed his membership in the Boston Browning Society, and served it most loyally. He was its fourth president. If an essayist fell out he could always be depended upon to fill the vacancy. If the discussion of the paper flagged he would brighten it with witty and entertaining remarks.

His reading of Browning was remarkable for its force and its interpretative quality. It reminded those who had known him in his early years of the saying among his college friends, that "a great actor was spoiled when Hornbrooke took to the pulpit." Those who heard him read the plea of Caponsacchi, the soliloquy of the Pope, or Guido's last frantic appeal in *The Ring and the Book,* had an experience they will never forget. His voice was as clear as a bell and for the time he *was* the one whose words he was rendering.

Some of his Browning papers besides those on *The Ring and the Book* are "The Religion in Browning's Poetry," "The Development in Browning's Poetry," "Saul," "Rabbi Ben Ezra," "Caliban upon Setebos," "Bishop Blougram's Apology," "Paracelsus," and "Browning's Five Prelates." A paper on "Mr. Sludge, the Medium" was published in "The Boston Browning Society Papers."

Dr. Hornbrooke was considered by competent critics to be one of the foremost Browning students and exponents in the entire world. But though so deeply interested in Browning's thought he did not seek to know his private life, and deplored the publication of the Barrett-Browning love letters. He would not read them nor allow them to be brought into his house. The writer well remembers when calling with her husband on Miss Harriet Hosmer, the sculptor, an intimate friend of Browning, the indignation with which both these Browning lovers inveighed against the lack of delicacy displayed in the giving to the world what should have been the heart secrets of the great poet and his wife.

Clerical and literary work did not claim all Dr. Hornbrooke's interest. He was a public-spirited citizen, taking a capable and interested part in public affairs.

Dr. Hornbrooke was a man of commanding figure and singularly individual and interesting personality, whom people on the street turned to look after and inquire who he was.

Failing health caused by intense application to study caused him in 1900 to resign his pastorate from the church he had served long and faithfully.

When he appeared to be regaining his health he died with tragic suddenness Saturday, December 5, 1903, leaving a community in mourning.

The day following his death eulogistic remarks were made on him in every church, both Catholic and Protestant, in the entire city. The rector of the nearest Catholic church told his large congregation "that Newton had lost its greatest citizen and every one of them a good friend."

All missed him. The appreciation of his gracious, kindly nature was touchingly expressed to the writer by an Irishman working on the street. He took off his hat and said, "You don't know me, ma'am, but I know you, and we are all sorry for your trouble. We all loved the Doctor, for he was the friendliest man that ever walked the streets."

A bust of him is now being made by C. E. Dallin, to be placed in Channing Church, Newton.

The manuscript of this book was Dr. Hornbrooke's last work. He finished it only a few days before his death. It is the loss of the reader that it did not have his final revision.

ORINDA A. D. HORNBROOKE.

NEWTON, MASS., October, 1909.

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CHAPTER I

THE RING AND THE BOOK

The Ring and the Book appeared during the years 1869 and 1870. The earlier parts met with slight favor; the later parts were recognized as works of great power, and on its completion many persons, most competent to judge, saw in it the supreme work of a great genius. It is true that some who had been enthusiastic readers of Browning's earlier poems professed their indifference to this poem. I know of one of these who boasts that he never read *The Ring and the Book.*

It is equally true that this work received cordial praise from many and different quarters. The *Atheneum* declared it to be "the most precious and profound religious treasure that England has produced since Shakespeare." Sidney Colvin called it "a work of pregnant genius." John Morley, one of the ablest critics of England in the nineteenth century, wrote a discriminating

and appreciative review of it, which he has included in his published works. In this he says: "When all is said that can be said about the violences which from time to time invade the poem, it remains true that the complete work affects the reader most powerfully with that wide unity of impression which it is the aim of dramatic art, and perhaps of all art, to produce." Dr. R. W. Church, dean of St. Paul's, who is widely and favorably known as a student and interpreter of Dante, writes in a private letter in 1870: —

"Then came *The Ring and the Book*, and that, in the first place satisfied a longing that I had long had, to have the same set of facts told and dealt with, not as they are in the usual novel or play — that is, with one side assumed to be the true one — but as they appeared to all manner of different people, each with his own prejudices and interests and rules of conduct and judgment, so as to have a little picture of the world judging the facts before it; and next, because I found in it such piercing insight into human realities of thought and feeling, into the depths and heights of the soul, such magnanimity, such pervading sense of judgment. Browning has a poet's eye, the most comprehensive, the most searching, the most minute, for the truths of our present existence

and of our future hopes, of any of our great names, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Shelley."

Dr. Connop Thirlwall, bishop of St. David's, and for thirty years the ablest thinker, the greatest scholar, and sanest intellect among the bishops of the Church of England, in one of his letters refers to *The Ring and the Book* in the highest terms: he admits, what may prove a comfort to many readers, that there are passages in the poem which he did not at once understand, but he attributes this very properly to the compactness of expression.

As a recognition of the value of the poem Balliol College, Oxford, conferred upon Mr. Browning the degree of Master of Arts, a more distinguished honor than that of D.C.L., because it makes the recipient a member of the University. Such an honor had been bestowed last upon Dr. Samuel Johnson. In view of the commendation given to this poem, we have no right to pronounce it unworthy our attention and study or to call it a poem which no one has ever cared to read. When English people sometimes say, as they do, "We know nothing about Browning in England," it means only that they and the circle to which they belong know nothing about him. They do not speak for all England.

These opinions, while they sustain me in my own view of the value of *The Ring and the Book*, have had no part in the formation of that view, and while what I may think about it cannot add to its value, I am sure that the story of my experience with it will have some interest and encouragement in it for others.

It was the first poem of Browning that really impressed me or took hold of me. Before the year 1876 I had read few of his poems, and what I had read had not attracted me. In that year, however, I came across a copy of *The Ring and the Book* in a library which the owner allowed me to use as my own. On my first reading, I found much in the book which seemed obscure, and I frankly confess that the connection of the thought was not always clear to me. In spite of this, it deeply impressed me and in some way made me conscious that it deserved more careful reading. I found in it so much that appealed to me that I was convinced there must be much more. I determined to read it again when I could give my undivided attention to it. Such a season came a few years later when I passed my summer vacation in a beautiful and restful part of Maine. Even then, I resolved to read it no longer than my interest lasted. Under these circumstances I began to

read the poem, and continued to read it, with unabated enjoyment to the end. I read it, as every one ought to read poems, for pleasure, and I found it. A strange attraction drew me to it day after day. The only other poem which has exerted the same power over me is the *Odyssey*.

Since then I have read the poem throughout at least thirty times, and every time with increased pleasure. The more I read it, the more I love it, and the less I find in it to censure. Even now I do not pretend to be able fully and satisfactorily to explain every passage in it. If this be urged against the poem, it is just as true of the great poems of Shakespeare and Milton. What student of either of these poets can explain everything they wrote? Sometimes what is most poetic is least capable of strict definition. But much in *The Ring and the Book* that once seemed perplexing has become clear. Often, too, I have found that the obscurities, of which I thought I had reason to complain, were not so much in the poem as in my own mind. Some difficulties which at first seemed hard to overcome became easy to surmount as I grew more familiar with the style and method of the poet. Fortunately it is not necessary to understand everything in a work of art before we can enjoy

it. If it were, how many of us could say with any degree of sincerity that we enjoy Goethe's *Faust?*

In reading the poem several convictions have forced themselves upon me.

1. *The Ring and the Book* is in harmony with Browning's peculiarly dramatic genius. During the first part of his poetic career he devoted himself to the preparation of plays for presentation on the stage. For some years his dramas appeared in rapid succession. In one of his poems, he names himself a "writer of plays." But these never attained any measure of success with the public. Macready did all he could for *Strafford* but even he could keep it on the stage for only a few days. *Colombe's Birthday* and *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* had the same experience; they met with some esteem, but no enthusiasm. It is sometimes said that Browning did not care for the comparative failure of his plays. I think he did care. I believe he regretted it very much. He knew he had something to say to the world in that way and, no doubt, he deplored the limitations which prevented him from making an impression upon it. There are evidences that he was anxious to succeed and that he did his best. Nor have his plays secured

better hearing since his fame as a great poet has become general. From time to time some of the best actors appear in one or another of his plays, and audiences who admire Browning are attracted, but it is usually evident that the actors do not understand or appreciate the characters they assume, and that the hearers do not experience real enjoyment.

Yet many who do not care to see his plays acted read them again and again with ever-increasing pleasure. It is easy to understand this. Browning had no experience of stage-craft, and he was ignorant of those devices by which plays are made effective in particular parts and as a whole. The stage was something to which he brought his play: he did not live on it. He lacked that practical training of which Shakespeare had so much. But the true cause of his failure as a writer of plays lies deeper than this. It is due to the fact that his characters reflect so much, and do so little. We hear what they say, but we never see what they do. They reveal every subtle train of thought and lay bare every hidden motive; even the most transient emotions find utterance. All this renders them delightful to the reader but, at the same time, unintelligible to the hearer. Plays full of mental analysis can never be popular, but Browning excels all other

writers of plays in his power to make his characters reveal themselves. He enables his readers to see every movement of their souls. If he has not the genius for making persons act in relation to one another, he has the genius for dramatic monologue, in which a person through what he says shows what he essentially is. It was a wise instinct, therefore, that prompted Browning to abandon the dramatic form for the dramatic spirit.

In *The Ring and the Book* he has dropped methods not in harmony with his nature, which he could not effectively use, and has constructed it in a way that gives ample scope to the full play of his characteristic power. When we come to the poem everything has been done and we are asked only to see how the men and women who have taken part in the action make themselves known to us by the way in which they give us their version of the story.

2. *The Ring and the Book* is in harmony with the dominant characteristic of our age. No age in the history of the world was ever so much interested in studies of the mind: it is pre-eminently psychological. This appears everywhere; in our histories which endeavor through the phenomena of the social and political life of an era to make us aware of the spirit that produces them, and

in our works of fiction which aim more to reveal character and the modes of its operation than to provide descriptions of natural scenery or to portray events. Again, this psychological interest shows itself in the numerous studies of mind that are constantly being published, and the constant demand for them. From studies of nature our age has been turning more and more to the study of the mind by which alone nature can be apprehended or comprehended.

Now it is the test of a great work of genius that while it is above the thought of the time in which it was written, it also responds to that thought. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* reflect the prevailing conditions of thought and feeling in the times when they appeared. Dante's *Divine Comedy* bears witness to the politics and religious thought of its age. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is an indication of the powerful influence of the Puritan spirit. It is to be expected that a great poem belonging to the last third of the nineteenth century should show in its method and spirit the dominance of the psychological interest, and *The Ring and the Book* fulfils that expectation. From beginning to end it is an insight into, and a revelation of the heights and depths of human nature. The poet himself seems conscious of this when he says, speaking

of the poem, "It lives," "if precious be the soul of man to man."

3. *The Ring and the Book* shows also the influence of the spirit of historic criticism.

It is sometimes said that one cannot tell to what age the poetry of Browning belongs. Any one who reads that poetry with his eyes open must know better. Not to speak of other poems, *The Ring and the Book* could not have been written in any other century of the world's history. The way in which it treats its theme is necessarily connected with a time that is sceptical as to the ability of one man or one party to tell the whole truth about any matter, — a time that seeks to examine many accounts before it forms a final opinion about a man, or a party, or a sect. Until within a comparatively few years the writing of history depended on any account that had come into the hands of the historian. No attempt was made to pierce the letter of the record or to get at the conditions which might disturb the impartiality of its author. It was tacitly assumed that Tacitus told the whole truth about the Cæsars, and that Eusebius told the whole truth about the leaders of heretical sects. But now the historian makes the record before him only the starting-point for his investigation. He tries to go behind the record and to get at the peculiari-

ties, the likes and dislikes of the writer or the political and religious prejudices and prepossessions which swayed him. He uses him simply as one way of getting at the real truth. He compares his account, if possible, with the accounts of others. He realizes how hard it is for one person to tell the whole truth.

Now in *The Ring and the Book* we have an illustration and manifestation of this spirit of historic criticism which everywhere prevails. The poet does not allow the reader to remain satisfied with one version of the story which underlies his poem. He shows us how various persons of different characters and interests tell it, and he causes these to unfold themselves in their narratives. We may not learn from them more about the actual facts, but we know better the thoughts of many hearts. The different stories also enable us to attain to a juster, because completer, knowledge of what actually happened. In this way the poem is a grand example of the spirit of historic criticism.

Mark Pattison in his life of Milton makes it clear, that being the man he was and living at the time and in the country he did, Milton could not have chosen a better subject than the one he took in *Paradise Lost*. So it may be said of Browning that one endowed with his peculiar

genius and living in an age animated by psychological interest and historic criticism, could not have done better than to write a poem like *The Ring and the Book*, in just the way he did write it, for it is an expression of what is best in himself and also a response to the imperative demand of the dominant spirit of his time.

CHAPTER II

THE STORY

THE story which forms the basis of *The Ring and the Book* is brief and simple. Pietro and Violante Comparini, a middle-aged married couple, lived in Rome. They were

> "Nor low i' the social scale nor yet too high,
> Nor poor nor richer than comports with ease."

Only a child was needed to make them perfectly contented with their lot. They longed for one, not merely to gratify the natural desire of their hearts, but also because they did not wish to have their little property go to unknown relatives, as it would, if they died childless.

At last a child was born, and named Pompilia, who remained with Pietro and Violante until she was thirteen years old. At that time the Abate Paolo asked Violante for her as a wife for his brother Count Guido Franceschini, a member of one of the noblest families in Arezzo in Tuscany. Guido had been for thirty years a hanger-on of one of the cardinals in Rome, in the hope of obtaining place and fortune.

Violante was, naturally enough, much flattered by the prospect of having a nobleman for a son-in-law, but Pietro, her husband, made inquiries among his acquaintances. They told him, that although Guido was a real count, he

> "was just the heir
> To the stubble once a corn-field, and brick-heap
> Where used to be a dwelling-place, now burned."

Upon this he refused to consider him as a husband for his daughter. Violante, however, was determined to have her way, and so, without Pietro's knowledge, she took Pompilia to the church of San Lorenzo and had her married to Count Guido.

When this had been done and could not be undone Pietro, though with an aching heart, consented to it. He entered into an arrangement that he and his wife should live in Arezzo together with Guido, Pompilia, and Guido's mother and brother Girolamo. In return for their maintenance during their lives, their little property was, on their death, to go to Guido. But the plan did not work well. The parents were unhappy in their new home, and at the end of four months left Arezzo to live, as best they could, at Rome. Nor was that all. Soon afterwards, in the Holy Year or Jubilee, Violante confessed to the priest,

who was vested by the Pope with special power of absolution, that Pompilia was not her own child but the "chance birth of a nameless drab."

Pietro, learning this, saw an opportunity to escape payment of the dowry or the fulfilment of any agreement which had been made. If Pompilia was not his own child, he was not bound to pay anything. Guido, on his part, maintained that the story of Pompilia's birth was a lie, told to disgrace him and to deprive him of his right to the dowry. The court at Rome tried the case between them and decided that while Pompilia was not the real child of Pietro and Violante, the dowry ought to be paid. This decision suited neither party, and the case was continued for further investigation.

While this legal contest was going on, the life of Pompilia in Arezzo became so unbearable that one night she fled from the place in company with a young canon of the church by the name of Giuseppe Caponsacchi. The two had almost reached Rome when they were overtaken by Guido at an inn of Castelnuovo. After a stormy scene the priest, according to his right, appealed to the court at Rome to try his case. The court there heard the statements submitted to them and gave a decision, which, trying to suit all,

really satisfied none. Caponsacchi was sent for a year to live in Civita Vecchia. Pompilia was consigned to the care of the Convertite nuns, whose special office was the care of fallen women. Later still she was placed in the care of her reputed parents. At the same time Guido was not allowed the divorce which he sought.

In a few months Pompilia gave birth to a son whom she named Gaetano. When Guido heard of this he went with four of his retainers to Rome, where, on a night soon after the Christmas of 1697, entering the home of Pietro and Violante, he killed them, and, as he thought, Pompilia, with them. He then attempted to escape from the papal territory into Tuscany where he would have been secure from all interference, but before he could reach the boundary he was overtaken, arrested, and brought to trial for murder.

His defence was that the conduct of his wife justified his deed and that Pietro and Violante deserved death because they had aided and abetted her in it. The court, however, refused to accept his plea, and sentenced him to be beheaded and his four companions to be hanged. But the case did not end here. Guido, because he had taken some minor orders in the church and so might be called an ecclesiastic, made an appeal

to the Pope, in the hope that he might see some reason to acquit him. Instead of this, the Pope rejected his appeal, confirmed the decision of the court, and ordered the immediate execution of him and his companions.

CHAPTER III

THE METHOD AND THE SPIRIT

THE first book of *The Ring and the Book* gives the reader all the information he needs concerning its name, source, and arrangement. In the first few lines (1–32) we learn that just as the craftsman separates the gold from the alloy, by the aid of which he has been able to fashion it into a ring, so the poet has wrought with the hard crude material of his story until he has, at last, left it a golden ring of poetry.

We are then told how and under what conditions the poet found "the square old yellow book" which contained all the bare facts he is to use and transform. Here we have an actual experience. There is such a book, and Browning bought it, as he says, in Florence, on the steps of the Riccardi palace, for a lira, or about twenty cents. This book is now in the library of Balliol College at Oxford. Then follows a vivid picture of the circumstances under which the poet read the book: —

"A book in shape but, really, pure crude fact
Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,
And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since."

With this in his hand he walked on, so absorbed in its contents that he noticed none of the usual scenes through which he was passing.

"Still read I on, from written title-page
To written index, on, through street and street,
At the Strozzi, at the Pillar, at the Bridge;
Till, by the time I stood at home again
In Casa Guidi by Felice Church,
Under the doorway where the black begins
With the first stone-slab of the staircase cold,
I had mastered the contents, knew the whole truth
Gathered together, bound up in this book,
Print three-fifths, written supplement the rest."

A captious critic might suggest that a book so bulky and so difficult could hardly be read through in twenty minutes. But we must not expect too much exactness of statement from a poet. We have next the subject of the book.

"'*Romana Homicidiorum*' — nay,
Better translate — 'A Roman murder-case:
Position of the entire criminal cause
Of Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
With certain Four the cutthroats in his pay,
Tried, all five, and found guilty and put to death
By heading or hanging as befitted ranks,
At Rome on February Twenty Two,
Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight:
Wherein it is disputed if, and when,
Husbands may kill adulterous wives, yet 'scape
The customary forfeit.'"

The poet now narrates the "fanciless facts" just as they lie recorded in the old yellow book.

In these commonplace incidents of the course of a murder trial, we have

> "The untempered gold, the fact untampered with,
> The mere ring-metal ere the ring be made!"

But what has come of it? It has no power to live or else it would be still living in the memories of men. Now, however, it lives only in this book, which, if it were destroyed, would leave Guido and Pompilia in absolute oblivion. Then, too, how little the "crude fact" gives us! From it we learn nothing about

> "Giuseppe Caponsacchi; — his strange course
> I' the matter, was it right or wrong or both?"

From it we learn nothing about either the old couple, Pietro and Violante, or the child of Guido and Pompilia, Gaetano. Nobody, the poet continues, has any recollection of the story, and he is unable to awaken any interest for it in the minds of those to whom he tells it. All records of it had long ago been destroyed. Those hostile to the church, when they found there was nothing in it against the church, but rather something in favor of it, cared to hear no more about it, while those friendly to the church promised him help if he became a convert to it. These latter ask him

" 'Do you tell the story, now, in offhand style,
Straight from the book? Or simply here and there,
(The while you vault it through the loose and large)
Hang to a hint? Or is there book at all,
And don't you deal in poetry, make-believe,
And the white lies it sounds like?' "

To these the poet answers "yes" and "no." He used his fancy in reshaping the story — as he claims he had a right to do, since

"Fancy with fact is just one fact the more."

With the aid of his fancy he tells the story again; — and now it assumes a more living character. As we read we come into closer relations with the actors in it, and we catch a glimpse of the motives of their actions. We are no longer dealing with past history, but the "tragic piece" is enacted before our eyes. We see what before we have only read about.

For some poets this would have been enough; not so for Browning. He seeks to make "the old woe" live again as it lived in Rome two centuries before. To do this he interfuses it with the motions of his own spirit. Man indeed cannot create out of nothing, but he can put life back into what once lived. The story of Faust is an illustration of this, but better still that of Elisha,

"Who bade them lay his staff on a corpse-face.
There was no voice, no hearing: he went in
Therefore, and shut the door upon them twain,
And prayed unto the Lord: and he went up
And lay upon the corpse, dead on the couch,
And put his mouth upon its mouth, his eyes
Upon its eyes, his hands upon its hands,
And stretched him on the flesh; the flesh waxed warm:
And he returned, walked to and fro the house,
And went up, stretched him on the flesh again,
And the eyes opened. 'T is a credible feat
With the right man and way."

In this manner the poet has unfolded the threefold method of dealing with his material. In the first place he can state the "crude fact" of the story without any addition of his own. Secondly, he can add fancy to the facts and so render them more impressive and attractive. And, finally, more than that, he can inform and transfuse the facts with his spirit and make them live before us. And now a spirit lives within him, laughs through his eye and sways him, as he turns the "medicinable leaves." The narrative of events reveals the presence of this spirit.

But the poet proposes to do even more than that. He will bring each character in the story before us, and cause him to appear now as he appeared long ago in Rome or Arezzo. He will reproduce the talk of the city and cause us to hear what those who watched the drama had to say.

The outline and structure of the poem grow naturally out of this. In the first book Half-Rome tells the story as it appeared to those who took the side of the husband. Then The Other Half-Rome tells it as it appeared to those whose sympathies were with the wife. Tertium Quid reproduces the view taken of the whole affair by the "superior social section." So much for the talk heard on the streets and in the drawing-rooms!

Now those who view the whole matter from within speak. First, Count Guido Franceschini gives his account of his life and deed, doing his best to appear in a good light before his judges.

> "He feels he has a fist, then folds his arms
> Crosswise, and makes his mind up to be meek."

Next comes Caponsacchi, the priest, and we hear his voice as he speaks in tones to which, under the circumstances, his judges feel they must listen in silence. Then, Pompilia, surrounded by those who watch for every word and minister to every need, sighs out, as she lies dying, her version of the affair. The lawyers appear on the scene "to teach our common sense its helplessness." Hyacinthus de Archangelis writes his plea on behalf of Guido, and is followed by an argument against him, framed by Dr. Johannes-Baptista Bottinius.

After all these comes the Pope, who must give the final decision in the case, and whose meditations we are permitted to hear as he sits

> "out the dim
> Droop of a sombre February day
> In the plain closet."

Guido speaks a second time, as he sits "on a stone bench" in his cell, to his old friends, the abate and the cardinal; and we learn from his speech how "the tiger-cat screams now that whined before." After this the poet promises to bring us down to the prosaic events that immediately followed the execution of Guido.

Each book of the poem is a fulfilment of what is indicated here, and he who reads this first book has the story and the plan of the entire poem. Whatever doubt he may have as to the meaning of particular passages, he can have no doubt as to the arrangement and purpose of the whole.

To many readers of *The Ring and the Book*, one account of it seems amply sufficient, and if we were concerned with the story alone the repetition of it might be wearisome. All we can know about it is well and clearly stated in the first book of the poem. The few incidents that are added in the following books are not important enough in themselves to justify the telling of the story over again.

We may assume that the poet knew this as well as any of his readers. He has deliberately chosen to allow each one of his personages to give his own version of the affair, not in order that we may know more about it, but that we may learn more of the different characters. Each narrative is a revelation of the thoughts and feelings of the narrator and discloses something of his character, so that when we have finished the poem we know the men and women in it as otherwise we could not hope to know them. To Browning the incidents of the poem are of slight importance, compared with the knowledge of the persons who relate them. When, therefore, we adopt his point of view the poem assumes an interest which grows and deepens to its completion.

CHAPTER IV

HALF-ROME AND THE OTHER HALF-ROME

THE books of Half-Rome, The Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid are, with the exception of the pleas of the lawyers and The Book and the Ring, the least interesting parts of the poem. After reading the first book, one may pass to the other parts without being aware of any serious loss. But while these portions are lacking in the intense interest which belongs to those parts where the actors in the story speak for themselves, they have value and significance in the general structure of the whole poem. In these three books Browning allows us to hear again the gossip of the street and the drawing-room as Rome heard it in 1698. The three persons who speak in the successive books are representative characters, meant to portray different phases of opinion and feeling. They make us feel as if we were living in the atmosphere of the tragic events which had just taken place, and as if we were looking at them in the

light of the prejudices, special experiences, sympathies, and antipathies of those around us.

As we read these books we become aware, as we could in no other way, of the sentiments with which Rome was quivering. Browning, in fact, has not drawn these representative characters from his imagination alone. In "the square old yellow book, part print, part manuscript," there are two versions of the tragic event: one written in sympathy with the husband, the other written in sympathy with the wife. From these the poet has drawn many of the statements and pleas which we find in the particular poems. Thus the poet did not create their opinions; he found them, and quickened them with the life of his own spirit. Tertium Quid, however, has been framed by Browning from a comparison of what he found in the two pamphlets. In this an attempt is made to give an impartial and balanced account of the whole story.

The oftener I read these books the better satisfied I am with them, the more conscious I am of their vital significance, and the gladder I am that they are where they are. *The Ring and the Book* would have lost something of its total impressiveness without these books, which the impatient reader is sometimes disposed to pass by or neglect.

They contain many beautiful passages, taken singly, but their main interest lies in the comparison of the different forms which the events and characters assume as the persons in them happen to take one side or the other. If we have ever been inclined to talk of seeing things as they are, these accounts will convince us that we never do anything of the kind. We see only according to what we ourselves are. Half-Rome speaks of the parents of Pompilia as "these wretched Comparini" and declares that Violante ought to be throttled for the deception she had practised on Pietro and Guido, while The Other Half-Rome describes the Comparini as "nor low i' the social scale nor yet too high." As for Violante, her deception was well meant; nobody was consciously wronged by it, and, besides, the soul of a child had been saved from destruction.

The accounts of the causes and motives of the marriage of Guido and Pompilia differ in the same way. Half-Rome asserts that Violante had used Pompilia as a bait to attract a husband and that she who had caught one fish could make the same bait catch a still bigger one. So "her minnow was set wriggling on its barb." Guido's motive in marrying her is explained as his desire to gain a "sweet drop from the bitter Past," "to

light the dark house," to "lend a look of youth to the mother's face grown meagre," and to better assert his right as elder brother in the home. Then, too, Guido was a choice catch, even if he was "past his prime and poor besides." He was a nobleman, with powerful friends, and he had "a palace one might run to and be safe" from importunate creditors. Half-Rome declares that Count Guido was made to "woo, win, and wed at once," and was carried to San Lorenzo and married "o' the sly there" by some "priest-confederate properly paid to make short work and sure," before he had time to think twice. As for Pietro he did not know of the marriage, in order that he might later play the part of the offended and outraged father.

But The Other Half-Rome assures the reader that the marriage of Guido and Pompilia was proposed by Guido's brother; the Abate Paolo, who came to the home of Pompilia and pleaded with her mother Violante, while her father Pietro, took his after-dinner nap. When, later, Violante told her husband of the proposal, he was delighted until he learned from his companions that Guido was miserably poor, and that he would not look at him or his if he had "one penny piece to rattle twixt his palms." In consequence Pietro refused to have anything to do with the proposed

marriage, congratulating himself that while "there was one hope the less" there was "not misery the more." Afterward, however, without his consent or knowledge, Pompilia was taken to the church by her mother and there married to Guido by a priest — "Abate Paolo, perhaps." Then Pietro when he could do nothing else, gave his consent and made the best he could of a bad matter.

The accounts of the old couple at Arezzo, in the palace of Guido, differ from beginning to end. Half-Rome accuses the Comparini of expecting too much and of anticipating rich banquets and lavish expenditure, as if "Plutus paid a whim." But Guido was through with all that; he had found soapsuds bitter to the tongue and hoped that by pinching and paring, he might furnish forth

"A frugal board, bare sustenance, no more,
Till times, that could not well grow worse, should mend."

This caused an outcry on the part of the Comparini, who complained to everybody that they were compelled "to house as spectres in a sepulchre," the "grimmest in a gruesome town," to "pick garbage on a pewter plate" — that they were "robbed and starved and frozen too." They called Guido's mother a "doited crone," "dragon and devil," and also criticised and blamed whatever his brother Girolamo did. After four months

of this purgatory — "Dog-snap and cat-claw, curse and counterblast" — they left Pompilia; "bade Arezzo rot; cursed life signorial," and returned to Rome.

The Other Half-Rome informs us that the Comparini touched bottom at Arezzo. There they had four months' experience of craft and greed, quickened by penury and pretentious hate; four months' taste of apportioned insolence, of graduated cruelty and ruffianism, until at last they fled for their lives to Rome, deeming themselves lucky to bear off a shred of skin, — while Guido remained "lord of the prey."

We have very different views of Pompilia's conduct at Arezzo, after the departure of her parents, in the two narratives. Half-Rome says that when the parents had gone Pompilia, pricked by some loyal impulse, wrote a letter in which she declared that since Pietro and Violante had departed "hell was heaven" and the house was now as quiet as "Carmel where the lilies live." All her complaints were due to their promptings. She further wrote that they had advised her to flee with a lover to Rome, first putting poison in Guido's cup and stealing his money and jewels. This Half-Rome assures us is

> "Fact . . . , and not a dream o' the devil . . .
> Word for word, such a letter did she write."

After this, however, Pompilia seems to have changed her mind. The house was too dull. She looked outside for life and light, and found both in Caponsacchi, for whom she was always watching at her windows. When Guido remonstrated with her about her conduct she rushed to the governor and to the archbishop, just to torment him and make him the laughing-stock of the town.

The Other Half-Rome asserts that the letter, said to have been written by Pompilia, was really written by her husband in pencil and retraced by her in ink. She was unable to write and had no knowledge of what she was induced to copy. Then Guido deliberately set himself to annoy her. He "chased her about the coop of daily life" and planned so that no other way of escape was left her than in the arms of Caponsacchi. When she had been forced to flee with him, Guido expected to be able to brand her as a castaway, and to gain all he wished, the property and the divorce. Pompilia, maddened by her misery and not knowing what to do, appealed to the governor and to the archbishop for help, but both alike declined to interfere. Then she went to a simple friar and begged him to write a letter for her to her parents. This he promised to do, but when he reflected that writ-

ing such a letter would involve him in danger, he sighed at the mistake of matrimony and did nothing. As a last resort she sought Caponsacchi, whom she had never seen before, and begged him to take her to Rome; — and this he consented to do. Does this seem improbable? "So is the legend of my patron saint."

In the account of the flight of Pompilia with Caponsacchi Half-Rome says that Pompilia drugged Guido, stole his money and jewelry, and having thus "spoiled the Philistines," jaunted jollily with her lover to Rome. But The Other Half-Rome claims that she rose up in the dark, laid hands on what came first, "clothes and a trinket or two," and stole from the side of her sleeping husband (who was perhaps sleeping, certainly silent), and then moved "unembarrassed as a fate" from room to room, to the door.

> "Wife and priest alike reply
> 'This is the simple thing it claims to be,
> A course we took for life and honour's sake,' . . .
> She says, 'God put it in my head to fly,
> As when the martin migrates: . . .
> And so we did fly rapidly all night,
> All day, all night — a longer night — again,
> And then another day, longest of days,
> . . . one thought filled both,
> "Fly and arrive!"'"

Half-Rome sneers at Caponsacchi "as sympathy made flesh," "Apollos turned Apollo," and

declares that he was always "felt everywhere in Guido's path." He says that Caponsacchi threw comfits to Pompilia in the theatre, "pressed close till his foot touched hers," and that Guido suspected some falseness, but he could do nothing. The Other Half-Rome maintains that Caponsacchi must of necessity be in Guido's way, since both of them

> "moved in the regular magnate's march;
> Each must observe the other's tread and halt
> At church, saloon, theatre, house of play."

It is not strange, therefore, that he "saw, pitied, loved Pompilia." They "understood each other at first look."

So differ also the conceptions of Guido. Half-Rome declares that he was forced by the conduct of Pietro and Violante to drive them from his home. He could not endure their clamor and the exposure they made of its poverty. After they had gone he treated Pompilia, at first, with kindness. He did not turn her out of doors; his compassion saved her from scandal. "All might go well yet." He treated her somewhat harshly only when he had reason to suspect her, only when he began to see the marks of Caponsacchi everywhere, as when "the trouble of eclipse hangs overhead." Then he is harsh because he has the right to judge.

But The Other Half-Rome states that Guido meant from the first to drive Pietro and Violante away by "graduated cruelty," and that it was also his purpose to force Pompilia by devilish devices into a life of shame and so to get rid of her while he retained the dowry.

> "So should the loathed form and detested face
> Launch themselves into hell and there be lost.
> While he looked o'er the brink with folded arms."

There are striking contrasts, again, in the judgments of Guido's motive in committing the murder and of his right to take the course he pursued. Half-Rome tells us that the news of the birth of a son was the last drop, which poisoned Guido to the bone. Then "the overburdened mind broke down," and "what was a brain became a blaze." He suggests that Guido named Caponsacchi at the door of the villa in order to make a last experiment to prove the innocence of Pompilia. He describes Guido's companions as "four stout hearts who had sisters and wives." Guido, he alleges, had indeed at first appealed to the courts, but since they had given him no aid he reverted to his original right, — the right of an injured husband. True, he overdid the matter, but his deed had made it better for "husbands of wives, especially in Rome."

But The Other Half-Rome asserts that Guido was moved to murder Pietro, Violante, and Pompilia because when these were out of the way his son would be the heir to all the money and he himself the only custodian of the helpless infant. That he named Caponsacchi at the door of the villa showed he knew that Caponsacchi was not within, since otherwise "The man's own self might have been found inside." He designates his four companions as "brutes of his breeding." After Guido's appeal to law he had no right to resort to violence; to allow that were "too commodious."

It will be seen that in Half-Rome we have a narrative of the affair according to those who were in sympathy with the husband, Guido. It gives us, in a distinct and well-defined form, the sentiments of those who favored his action and approved his course. The person who expresses this phase of popular feeling comes before us in a critical mood. The Roman government was at that time entirely in the hands of ecclesiastics, and the court was composed of those who had condemned Guido. Hence those who defended him were inclined to find fault with everything that was done or left undone.

Thus Half-Rome begins with a word of reproach for the priests of San Lorenzo.

"Fie! what a roaring day we 've had! Whose fault?
Lorenzo in Lucina, — here 's a church
To hold a crowd at need, accommodate
All comers from the Corso! If this crush
Make not its priests ashamed of what they show
For temple-room, don't prick them to draw purse
And down with brick and mortar, eke us out
The beggarly transept with its bit of apse
Into a decent space for Christian ease,
Why, to-day's lucky pearl is cast to swine."

He has his contemptuous word for the wooden railing in the church, which the crowd broke, painted like porphyry to deceive the eye. He also has a keen vision for pretense, as we see in his account of the young curate, who comes into the church, mounts the pulpit, and attributes this terrible tragedy to the influence of Molinism "the philosophic sin" — because the cardinal who had written a book on that heresy were present. He approves of the conduct of Guido, on the whole, but there is a touch of cynicism in his approval. People would care more for him if he were less known, and were not still alive. Half-Rome shows himself a shrewd observer of social ways. He knows how people defer to nobility, and he appreciates the value of being connected with "a nobleman with friends," who has a palace in which one may be safe from importunate creditors.

At the same time he fully understands the shifts

to which impecunious nobility must resort, "the pinching and paring" to get "bare sustenance"; "the cold glories served up with three paul's worth sauce." But with all his shrewdness and keen perception of actual facts his bias is so decidedly in favor of Guido that he takes all he says about his affairs as absolutely true. He accepts without a doubt the story that Pompilia wrote a letter after the departure of her reputed parents, as he accepts the correspondence between Caponsacchi and Pompilia without criticism. As he has no doubt of Guido's word, so he has no faith in Pompilia's honor. He assumes, as a matter of course, that she must be guilty of what is imputed to her, because she belongs to a certain class and has been placed under certain circumstances. She found herself he says, young and fair, and that her husband was old and poor, and so she did what all like her do, "looked out of the window for life and liberty" — and found both in Caponsacchi.

He displays the same kind of class judgment, when he comes to consider Caponsacchi. He was a priest, fine looking, in great favor with society in Arezzo, and with abundant leisure; he must have done what Guido said he did. Taking for granted, as he does, Pompilia's misconduct at the inn, he sees in her act of drawing

the sword of Guido, and threatening his life, only an exhibition of effrontery. He has only a sneer for the popular opinion in her favor. Guido, he thinks, overdid his act, but he was engaged in a good cause, in the interest of the rights of the family, which he always regards as necessarily identical with those of the husband.

At the close of the poem he clearly reveals the motive which has animated him, and which, no doubt, represents the motives of many about him. He had been annoyed by the attention which the cousin of the one to whom he was talking had been paying his wife. This deed of Guido, though somewhat exaggerated, since he had killed three instead of one, had made it worse for him, but

> "The better for you and me and all the world, —
> Husbands of wives, especially in Rome.
> The thing is put right, in the old place, — ay
> The rod hangs on its nail behind the door,
> Fresh from the brine: a matter I commend
> To the notice, during Carnival that 's near,
> Of a certain what 's-his-name and jackanapes
> Somewhat too civil of eves with lute and song
> About a house here, where I keep a wife.
> (You being his cousin may go tell him so.)"

To The Other Half-Rome the continued existence of Pompilia seems a miracle. She had prayed for this, and her last prayer had been answered.

He notes the difference between her as she was a few days since, when no one noticed her, and now when the great artist Maratta declares "a lovelier face is not in Rome." He shows moral perception in his judgment of Violante who had passed off Pompilia as her own child. At first it might seem as if she had done what was almost praiseworthy in taking her from the slums, and nurturing her in a good home. "What so excessive harm was done?" To which, he thinks, the dreadful answer came in this tragedy which had taken place.

His sympathy with Pompilia causes him to believe what the companions of Guido had said, that all of him was "gone except sloth, pride, rapacity." So, too, his sympathy makes it easy for him to believe that the story of Caponsacchi's conduct was no more improbable than the story of his patron saint. He believed in the one case what he wanted to believe, why not in the other? Men acted from unusual motives ages ago, why not now? Even out of his unreasoning sympathy there had grown a noble insight.

"At last she took to the open, stood and stared
With her wan face to see where God might wait —
And there found Caponsacchi wait as well
For the precious something at perdition's edge,
He only was predestinate to save, —
And if they recognized in a critical flash

From the zenith, each the other, her need of him,
His need of . . . say, a woman to perish for,
The regular way o' the world, yet break no vow,
Do no harm save to himself, — if this were thus?
How do you say? It were improbable;
So is the legend of my patron-saint.

Anyhow, whether, as Guido states the case,
Pompilia, like a starving wretch i' the street
Who stops and rifles the first passenger
In the great right of an excessive wrong, —
Did somehow call this stranger and he came, —
Or whether the strange sudden interview
Blazed as when star and star must needs go close
Till each hurts each and there is loss in heaven —
Whatever way in this strange world it was, —
Pompilia and Caponsacchi met, in fine,
She at her window, he i' the street beneath,
And understood each other at first look."

This sympathy with Pompilia makes him conscious of Guido's intentions. He has no special knowledge of these, but compassion makes him wise, and he enters into the motive, which, Pompilia says, made her leave her husband's home:

"'God put it in my head to fly,
As when the marten migrates: autumn claps
Her hands, cries "Winter 's coming, will be here,
Off with you ere the white teeth overtake!
Flee!" So I fled.'"

He realizes that she obeyed the great call of nature which prompts the she-dove to seek "the unknown shelter by undreamed-of shores." He has

no patience with Guido's plea that he had a right to resort to violence after he had applied to the courts to decide his case: one or the other he ought to follow. To take the law and then, after it had failed him, to resort to violence was "too commodious" and would not do.

CHAPTER V

TERTIUM QUID

We have heard voices telling the story of *The Ring and the Book* as they happened to be advocates of the wife or of the husband. In Tertium Quid we hear the voice, not of an advocate but of one who poses as judge and who sums up the possible arguments which may be urged on both sides. He is fully aware that his presentation of the affair is far superior to the popular view. There has been, he thinks, enough loose and passionate talk, and now the time has come "to allow qualified persons to pronounce." Some people think law will clear it all up, but law has already failed. He recounts contemptuously the pleadings of the lawyers, expresses his gratification at being able to entertain people of quality, and, at the same time, his contempt for the mob, and then proceeds to give a detailed account of the condition and conduct of Pietro and Violante up to the time of the marriage of Pompilia. In his description of the act of Violante in passing off Pompilia, the child of a public woman, for her own, he dwells on the good as well as the evil in

it. We might, he says, infer from this incident in her life that she was capable of

> "Black hard cold
> Crime like a stone you kick up with your foot
> I' the middle of a field."

So he himself thought formerly, but he now considers the good that has come from her deed: "The sin has saved a soul." The heirs to the property are not wronged because they do not know they are wronged. Then he knows that Pietro was made a better man through the child; his habits are improved, he learns how to practise self-denial, and his debts are paid. Violante herself, being happy, was good.

In the matter of the marriage neither party was really deceived. Each got what he bargained for. Guido got the money and the bride got the title. Neither party, however, obtained all he hoped by the transaction. The aged couple found this out first. They saw that Guido was penniless, and at once screamed "We are cheated." It was not until Guido's cruelty forced them to leave his house that Violante confessed that Pompilia was not her own child, and that Pietro saw in the confession his opportunity of revenge and advantage.

But Guido retorts that he is the wronged one. He did what he promised, and conferred a real title upon his wife. That he was poor was a mere

incident which might change at any time. But the old couple had promised to give him their child in marriage, and instead, they had given him "a drab's brat." It is hard to determine which of the two parties was cheater or cheated.

Guido's treatment of his wife is explained, on the one hand, by his desire to drive her into a life of shame and to compel her to accept the attentions of Caponsacchi. On the other hand, it may be urged that it is not necessary to resort to such unusual reasons for Pompilia's conduct; the perversity and weakness of woman's nature might account for that.

Then, why should Guido frighten his wife with dread of Caponsacchi, if he wanted her to flee with him? The case had been heard and tried in the Tuscan courts, and they had decided in favor of Guido; how then could his conduct be such as was imputed to him? Even if he wished her to take Caponsacchi as her lover and to flee with him, how could he bring the priest, over whom he had no power, to take his part in the transaction? Admit, too, that Pompilia was wronged, does that justify Caponsacchi's conduct and make it right for him to "Go journeying with a woman that's a wife?"

Again, it is contended by the priest that he had had no previous acquaintance with the wife, and

that he felt the truth by instinct. But Guido replies that Caponsacchi did visit his wife and that letters were carried from one to the other by a wench in his own house, and that these letters were found in the inn where they were overtaken and arrested. To this, however, reply is made by both Pompilia and Caponsacchi, that not one word in the letters was written by either of them. Guido, they say, who would profit by them, forged them. On behalf of Guido, it is urged that he had no need to resort to the devices attributed to him. He had shown himself a man of force in the end, why should he resort to "weak intrigues" in the beginning? Poison or even violence in his own house would with little or no risk have attained the same result. But to this the priest may reply: You use violence at last because, like a fox, you will turn when caught. Then, in the end, the birth of the child made Pompilia's murder profitable to Guido. In defence of himself the priest replied, "Knowing also what my duty was, I did it."

Guido's conduct when he had overtaken the fleeing pair at the inn is capable of different interpretations. His enemies say that having failed to act at the moment and submitted himself to the courts, he had lost all right to act afterward. But Guido's friends may urge that everybody

applauded his appeal to the courts. These had really decided nothing, wavering between the two parties, and Guido, maddened by their delay, took on himself the office of judge in his own case. Even suppose he was a coward, has not a coward rights? Then, too, it may be urged in behalf of Guido, that a wrong like his grows not less but more with the lapse of time.

Pompilia's conduct in her dying hours may be capable of different interpretations: it is as explicable on the supposition of guilt as of innocence. Some may and do say that her words and prayers show "she was of wifehood, one white innocence." Others say that they only show she was consistent in her evil from the beginning to the end of her life, and that as she has "braved heaven and deceived earth throughout," so now she does the same to clear her lover and convict her husband. Tertium Quid thinks there is great exaggeration on both sides.

The wife's friends exclaim over the enormous crime committed for nothing. They will not allow that she merited any punishment. They must make her out an angel, and her parents angels too, "of an aged sort." Guido can hardly be the man his enemies suppose him to be. He is not a "monster" but a "mere man." His mother loves him, his brothers stand by him, the

archbishop and governor of his native place know, approve, and aid him. He has cardinals who vouch for him and one of them made the marriage for him. Can such a man commit the awfullest of crimes for nothing? It may be that Guido is innocent and is really sacrificed to the popular clamor for justice.

While Tertium Quid decides nothing his version of the whole affair gives us the materials upon which a judgment can be based. He also provides information which so far we have not had, and which adds to our knowledge of some of the characters and their doings. He gives us, to begin with, the fullest account of the way in which Pietro and Violante lived: the easy self-satisfaction of Pietro in his good living, and the pride of Violante in her fine clothes. He indicates how they came to be in debt and were compelled to seek help from the largess of the Pope. He tells us how Violante proposes to remedy this state of things by providing an heir; how she goes to the miserable home of the future mother of Pompilia, and so overawes the poor woman with the "swirl of silk" that she imagines the Madonna herself has made her a visit. The woman herself is vividly portrayed, and we know her almost as well as if we had seen her washing clothes "at the cistern by Citorio." We overhear the proposition made

to her to sell her future child. We have learned the fact before, but in the fuller statement it becomes more real. Tertium Quid enables us to follow Violante as she marches in triumph over the success of her scheme to the church and joins in the singing of the Magnificat:

> "'My reproof is taken away
> And blessed shall mankind proclaim me now.'"

so that the priest on the altar turns to see who offers such obstreperous praise.

He gives us a more complete account of Guido and his family. We learn all the miserable economies of Guido's home; how one of the sons entered the church, how the daughters are married, how Guido in the hope of a fortune came to Rome and served a cardinal there for thirty years, and how, when he had been at last dropped from his service, he proposed to return to Arezzo, his ancestral home. He gives us the advice of Guido's brother Paolo that he should marry and so gain a little money to take home with him. He describes Guido's visit to the barber who told him of Pompilia and Paolo's visit to Violante. Tertium Quid gives the details of Pompilia's visit to the hermit and the meditation of the hermit afterward.

> "a certain friar of mean degree
> Who heard her story in confession, wept,

Crossed himself, showed the man within the monk.
'Then will you save me, you the one i' the world?
I cannot even write my woes, nor put
My prayer for help in words a friend may read, —
I no more own a coin than have an hour
Free of observance, — I was watched to church,
Am watched now, shall be watched back presently, —
How buy the skill of scribe i' the market-place?
Pray you write down and send whatever I say
O' the need I have my parents take me hence!'
The good man rubbed his eyes and could not choose —
Let her dictate her letter in such a sense
That parents, to save breaking down a wall,
Might lift her over: she went back, heaven in her heart.
Then the good man took counsel of his couch,
Woke and thought twice, the second thought the best:
'Here I am, foolish body that I be,
Caught all but pushing, teaching, who but I,
My betters their plain duty, — what, I dare
Help a case the Archbishop would not help,
Mend matters, peradventure, God loves mar?
What hath the married life but strifes and plagues
For proper dispensation? So a fool
Once touched the ark, — poor Uzzah that I am!
Oh married ones, much rather should I bid
In patience all of ye possess your souls!
This life is brief and troubles die with it:
Where were the prick to soar up homeward else?'
So saying he burnt the letter he had writ,
Said *Ave* for her intention, in its place,
Took snuff and comfort, and had done with all."

The fact of the murder we have known before, but Tertium Quid gives some details which make it vivid. We hear Pietro as

"He bellows, 'Mercy for heaven, not for earth!
Leave to confess and save my sinful soul,
Then do your pleasure on the body of me!'"

and we hear Guido reply

"Nay, father, soul with body must take its chance."

We see Pompilia as she

"rushes here and there
Like a dove among the lightnings in her brake."

and Guido as

"He lifts her by the long dishevelled hair
Holds her away at arm's length with one hand,
While the other tries if life come from the mouth —
Looks out his whole heart's hate on the shut eyes,
Draws a deep satisfied breath, 'So, dead at last!'
Throws down the burden on dead Pietro's knees
And ends all with 'Let us away, my boys.'"

When Guido was arrested, he asked who told them 't was he who did the deed. And on hearing the reply, "Why, naturally your wife," he

"drops
O' the horse he rode, — they have to steady and stay,
At either side the brute that bore him, bound,
So strange it seemed his wife should live and speak!"

Tertium Quid tells us for the first time of the decision of the Tuscan courts against Pompilia, of which Guido made all he could. All this is knowledge which a person of the superior social section might be supposed to have.

As we examine further the character of Tertium Quid, we see that the person who speaks here has evidently taken great pains to acquire all possible information. He has no confidence in the ability of the law to get at the actual fact; he understands the mechanical and external methods it uses. He represents the superior class, and all that he says shows him to be one whose education fits him to take a more dispassionate view of the incidents in the case of Guido, while, at the same time, it shows him to be a man whose sympathies do not extend beyond his particular set. He is very considerate of those among whom he moves; he desires to do whatever will add to their pleasure and to avoid whatever will cause them annoyance or inconvenience. For those outside his aristocratic circle, however, he has no concern. They are of another sort and have nothing in common with people of his kind. He does not enter into the feelings of the people in his story. He scornfully refers to the "mob" whose opinion is worthless compared with his. The trouble with people, he says, is that they forget that they are only dealing with the "commonalty." This is merely an "episode in burgess life," and people talk as if they had to do with "a noble pair." To him there are different codes for different sets of peo-

ple, and he blames Pietro and Violante because "themselves love themselves" although such a course is "far from worst even for their betters." He describes them as "human slugs," and "pauper saints." He thinks it would be better for the Pope to crush such people instead of feeding them. He has no patience with a woman like Violante, and says of her

> "Judge by the way she bore adversity
> O' the patient nature you ask pity for."

His account of the affair is impartial and balanced, but it lacks any real insight.

Tertium Quid does not bring us a step nearer to the actual truth. He has information but no sympathy with the parties about whom he has taken so much trouble to inform himself. Never for a moment does he catch a glimpse of the pure motive of Pompilia. It does not require, he thinks, all the malicious devices of Guido to cause her to flee with the priest, any more than it requires that Etna should vomit flames to melt an icicle. Her conduct can be explained by more obvious reasons:

> "We must not want all this elaborate work
> To solve the problem why young Fancy-and-flesh
> Slips from the dull side of a spouse in years,
> Betakes it to the breast of Brisk-and-bold
> Whose love-scrapes furnish talk for all the town!"

Nor has Tertium Quid any conception of Guido's real character. He thinks he cannot be as bad as his enemies say he is. He has been "born, bred, and brought up" in the usual way. His mother loves him, his brothers stand by him, the Archbishop and Governor of his native town favor him, he has been in the household of a cardinal who arranged his marriage. Such an one need not be a "monster" but only "a mere man." People, he thinks, are mistaken in regarding Pompilia as an angel and Guido as a demon; perhaps the truth lies between. Pompilia may have been a little to blame, while Guido was inconsiderate in his treatment of her. It is significant that his version of the story has no interest for those to whom he talks. They wish to be somewhere else, and he closes with the muttered remark

> "You 'll see, I have not so advanced myself,
> After my teaching the two idiots here!"

After all, the world cares very little for versions of events, the balance between probabilities, without any vital concern for the persons engaged in them. It loves the plea of the advocate and the statement of one who puts his heart into what he says. It is not regardless of the truth, but, with a correct instinct, it feels that a speaker

is not nearer to the real facts because of his indifference. History is not correct because it is impartial and dull. It may be that Browning takes occasion in Tertium Quid to satirize the kind of history which depends more upon information painfully heaped up and compared in some external way than for the insight which through sympathy divines the real motives and characters of men and women. The listeners to Tertium Quid, no doubt, thought he was clever, but they knew he bored them. So many praise the laborious compiler of mere facts, but they do not read him. Interest belongs to the historian who cares for those of whom he writes.

CHAPTER VI

COUNT GUIDO FRANCESCHINI

We have heard the story of *The Ring and the Book* as related first by the poet, who has put the life of his spirit into it, then by voices of the Rome of 1698, speaking on one side or the other on the street, or on either side in the drawing rooms. These speak, however, as representative characters. But now we hear the narrative of one who has a vital personal interest in the matter, and is an integral element in the story. Count Guido Franceschini knows that every word he says may count for life or death.

Guido appears to plead his cause before the judges of the Roman court. He has been severely racked, but he is determined to assume the most gracious mood. He thanks the court for giving him wine when he had expected only vinegar. He disclaims all bitterness of feeling for the sufferings he had been compelled to undergo: they were only what the law demanded. And, after all, these physical sufferings were as nothing compared with the "rasp-tooth toying with his

brain" during the last four years. The poverty of his home, the exposure of its economies, the scandalous reports about his treatment of his wife and her actual misconduct; these things had caused him more anguish than the court could inflict. Its mistake had been simply, "to make a stone roll down hill," "to make him ope mouth in his own defence." He acknowledges that he killed Pompilia and the Comparini, and he proposes to give the right interpretation of the "irregular deed."

His defence falls into three main divisions. The first division, with the exception of the introduction just described, is entirely devoted to an account of his life experience up to the time of his marriage to Pompilia. He relates this to show that his present condition is due to the fact that he had been willing to walk in the path prescribed for him. He relates the history of his family, recalls its former wealth and power, and notes the poverty into which it had fallen. "We became poor as Francis or our Lord." He says he was led by this state of his family to consider why such-an-one, whose grandfather sold tripe, was adding a fourth tower to his "purchased pile," while his own palace "could hardly show a turret sound"; why another, whose father "dressed vines," should roll in wealth

and luxury. He observed that the first was a soldier, the second a priest. He thought he might do as they had done, if he should enter either the army or the church. To this, however, his relatives would not listen. It would not do for him — the oldest son, to risk his life in battle or to doom his family to extinction by taking the vow of celibacy. That might do for his brothers but not for him.

So Guido went to Rome, took minor orders, which brought him near the church and yet left him free from some of its obligations, and entered the service of a cardinal. In that service he waited for thirty years. At the end of that time he became discouraged, and said to his friends: —

"'I am tired: Arezzo 's air is good to breathe;
Vittiano, — one limes flocks of thrushes there;
A leathern coat costs little and lasts long:
Let me bid hope good-bye, content at home!'"

His friends protested against his withdrawal. Like gamblers they did not like to have one of their number leave too much discouraged at his losses. But his brother, the Abate Paolo, said to him: —

"'Count you are counted; still you 've coat to back,
Not cloth of gold and tissue, as we hoped,
But cloth with sparks and spangles on its frieze
From Camp, Court, Church, enough to make a shine,

Entitle you to carry home a wife.
With the proper dowry, let the worst betide!
Why, it was just a wife you meant to take!'"

Paolo found out that Pietro and Violante had a daughter, and a small fortune. He told Guido:

"'She 's young,
Pretty and rich; you 're noble, classic, choice.
Is it to be a match?'"

Guido accepted all and was married to Pompilia.

He says that when his trouble came he was asked

"'What?
No blush at the avowal you dared buy
A girl of age beseems your granddaughter,
Like ox or ass? Are flesh and blood a ware?
Are heart and soul a chattel?'"

In reply to this he boldly avows that his marriage was purely a business transaction, — so much money for so much nobility. Honor is a privilege, worth the market price, to be sold to the one who will pay most for it. True, he says, Pietro and Violante soon grew tired of the bargain, just as others may of a picture they have purchased. They found his way of living very different from what they had imagined it, and could not endure it. But Guido claims,

"I paid down all engaged for, to a doit;
Delivered them just that which, their life long,

They hungered in the hearts of them to gain —
Incorporation with nobility thus
In word and deed: for that they gave me wealth."

Pietro and Violante had the name they bargained for, and the lot was none

"other than the daily hap
Of purblind greed that dog-like still drops bone,
Grasps shadow, and then howls the case is hard."

Guido discusses the obligations of marriage, and seeks to justify his treatment of Pompilia and his conduct in general. He declares that Pompilia "broke her pact" — and that he had a right to be harsh. He denies that marriage called for love on his part. If some one's daughter had avowed her love for him, and appealed to his love for her

"Then indeed
The lady had not reached a man of ice!
I would have rummaged, ransacked at the word
Those old odd corners of an empty heart
For remnants of dim love the long disused,
And dusty crumblings of romance! But here,
We talk of just a marriage, if you please —
The every day conditions and no more."

Guido had married Pompilia as one would purchase a hawk: and if the hawk does not render the expected service he has a right to "twist her neck." He says:

"The obligation I incurred was just
To practice mastery, prove my mastership: —
Pompilia's duty was — submit herself,
Afford me pleasure, perhaps cure my bile."

He maintains that Pompilia had no more right to complain of his treatment than the monk who found the "claustral regimen too sharp" because he had "fancied Francis' manna meant roast quails." Guido then says:

"The couple, father and mother of my wife,
Returned to Rome, published before my lords,
Put into print, made circulate far and wide
That they had cheated me, who cheated them.
Pompilia, I supposed their daughter, drew
Breath first 'mid Rome's worst rankness, through the deed
Of a drab and a rogue, was bye-blow bastard-babe
Of a nameless strumpet, passed off, palmed on me
As the daughter with the dowry. Daughter? Dirt
O' the kennel! Dowry? Dust o' the street! Naught more,
Not less, naught else but — oh — ah — assuredly
A Franceschini and my very wife!"

He then states what Pompilia ought, out of sheer gratitude because he had not turned her out of doors, to have said after her reputed parents had fled.

"Why here 's the — word for word, so much, no more —
Avowal she made, her pure spontaneous speech
To my brother the Abate at first blush,
Ere the good impulse had begun to fade:
So did she make confession for the pair,
So pour forth praises in her own behalf."

In answer to the accusation that this was the language of a letter which he himself had written and caused her to trace, he allows its truth and urges that he only

> "made her see
> What it behoved her see and say and do,
> Feel in her heart and with her tongue declare. — "

He seeks to justify this by comparing it with the act of the priest who causes "the palsy smitten finger" to make the sign of the cross "at the critical time" or who baptizes "the inarticulate babe" who may grow up and disown what is done. But, Guido continues, Pompilia "soon discovered she was young and fair" — and instead of acting as, in view of the reports of her birth, she should have acted, she displayed her charms, and found a lover in the priest Caponsacchi.

> "It was in the house from the window, at the church
> From the hassock — where the theatre lent its lodge,
> Or staging for the public show left space, —
> That still Pompilia needs must find herself
> Launching her looks forth, letting looks reply
> As arrows to a challenge; on all sides
> Ever new contribution to her lap,
> Till one day, what is it knocks at my clenched teeth
> But the cup full, curse-collected all for me?
> And I must needs drink, drink this gallant's praise,
> That minion's prayer, the other fop's reproach,
> And come at the dregs to — Caponsacchi!"

It is true he was harsh, but it would have been better for all if he had been even more severe, and, he says:

"If I, — instead of threatening, talking big,
Showing hair-powder, a prodigious pinch,
For poison in a bottle, — making believe
At desperate doings with a bauble-sword,
And other bugaboo-and-baby-work, —
Had, with the vulgarest household implement,
Calmly and quietly cut off, clean thro' bone
But one joint of one finger of my wife,
. . . . . .
Why, there had followed a quick sharp scream, some pain,
Much calling for plaister, damage to the dress,
A somewhat sulky countenance next day,
Perhaps reproaches, — but reflections too!
. . . . . .
So, by this time, my true and obedient wife
Might have been telling beads with a gloved hand;
Awkward a little at pricking hearts and darts
On sampler possibly, but well otherwise:
Not where Rome shudders now to see her lie."

The result of the course which he did adopt was that he awoke one morning to find that Pompilia had eloped with Caponsacchi. He pursued and overtook them. Every one blamed him, he says, for not taking his revenge at the time he found them: then was the time, or never, "to take the natural vengeance." But now, when he has killed his wife and her parents, every one cries "so little reverence for law."

The only reason why he failed to act at the critical moment at the inn must be, all think, because he was a coward. But, he says, he had been taught all his life to respect law, and for that reason he had appealed to it. Even if he were a poltroon, still he had his rights. So he had Pompilia and Caponsacchi arrested, and found, in the room where they had been, letters, which, he declares, it would be useless for them to say they did not write.

He then relates the course which law took in the matter. It had inflicted only mild punishment upon Pompilia and Caponsacchi, but mild as the punishment was it proved them guilty and himself innocent. On this ground he had applied to the court for a divorce.

> "He 's banished, and the fact 's the thing.
> Why should law banish innocence an inch?
> Here 's guilt then, what else do I care to know?
> The adulteress lies imprisoned, — whether in a well
> With bricks above and a snake for company,
> Or tied by a garter to a bed-post, — much
> I mind what 's little, — least 's enough and to spare!
> The little fillip on the coward's cheek
> Serves as though crab-tree cudgel broke his pate."

But the court refused his request for a divorce — informed him that he was met by the cross-suit of his wife for a separation, and also that she had been transferred to the care of her parents.

His brother Paolo who had tried in vain to induce the Pope to hear the case himself was overwhelmed with the ridicule of Rome, and left Rome for some other land. After all this, Guido says, he endeavored to steel his heart against whatever might happen, when there came the unexpected tidings of the birth of a son.

"I got such missives in the public place;
When I sought home, — with such news, mounted stair
And sat at last in the sombre gallery,
('T was Autumn, the old mother in bed betimes,
Having to bear that cold, the finer frame
Of her daughter-in-law had found intolerable —
The brother, walking misery away
O' the mountain-side with dog and gun belike)
As I supped, ate the coarse bread, drank the wine
Weak once, now acrid with the toad's-head-squeeze,
My wife's bestowment — I broke silence thus:
'Let me, a man, manfully meet the fact,
Confront the worst o' the truth, end, and have peace!
I am irremediably beaten here, —
The gross illiterate vulgar couple, — bah!
Why, they have measured forces, mastered mine,
Made me their spoil and prey from first to last.
They have got my name, — 't is nailed now fast to theirs,
The child or changeling is anyway my wife;
Point by point as they plan they execute,
They gain all, and I lose all — even to the lure
That led to loss, — they have the wealth again
They hazarded awhile to hook me with,
Have caught the fish and find the bait entire:
They even have their child or changeling back
To trade with, turn to account a second time.

. . . . . .

They have caught me in the cavern where I fell,
Covered my loudest cry for human aid
With this enormous paving-stone of shame.
Well, are we demigods or merely clay?
Is success still attendant on desert?
Is this, we live on, heaven and the final state,
Or earth which means probation to the end?
Why claim escape from man's predestined lot
Of being beaten and baffled? — God's decree,
In which I, bowing bruised head, acquiesce.

. . . . . .

I have attained to my full fifty years,
(About the average of us all, 't is said,
Though it seems longer to the unlucky man)
— Lived through my share of life; let all end here,
Me and the house and grief and shame at once.

. . . . . .

Good-bye!
My brothers are priests, and childless so; that 's well —
And, thank God most for this, no child leave I —
None after me to bear till his heart break
The being a Franceschini and my son!' "

And then the letter tells him that he has just that to bear, and he says he "rose up like fire, and fire-like roared." This apparent heir was a new disgrace, an ignominy he could not and would not bear — and he cries

"Shall I let the filthy pest buzz, flap and sting,
Busy at my vitals and, nor hand nor foot
Lift, but let be, lie still and rot resigned?
No, I appeal to God, — what says Himself,
How lessons Nature when I look to learn?
Why, that I am alive, am still a man

With brain and heart and tongue and right-hand too —
Nay, even with friends, in such a cause as this,
To right me if I fail to take my right.
No more of law; a voice beyond the law
Enters my heart, *Quis est pro Domino?* "

Guido tells his judges that the serving people who knew his story agreed with him as to the course he ought to pursue and that having selected four of them, he moved toward Rome and arrived there on Christmas Eve. For several days, influenced by the associations of the season, he delayed, but on the ninth day he felt that "some end must be," and "beckoned to his companions: 'Time is come!'" From here to the end of the speech we have the direct defense of Guido.

It is a well-known proverb that he who pleads his own case has a fool for a client. This is not true in the case of Guido. His defense is shrewd and able: every point is urged with skill and force. He is tactful and makes the most of every opportunity. He first shows that the killing of his wife and her parents was an act of passion which might not have been committed if he had met Pompilia at the door, or even Pietro, instead of Violante.

"And then, — why, even then, I think,
I' the minute that confirmed my worst of fears,
Surely, — I pray God that I think aright! —

Had but Pompilia's self, the tender thing
Who once was good and pure, was once my lamb
And lay in my bosom, had the well-known shape
Fronted me in the door-way, — stood there faint
With the recent pang perhaps of giving birth
To what might, though by miracle, seem my child, —
Nay more, I will say, had even the aged fool
Pietro, the dotard, in whom folly and age
Wrought, more than enmity or malevolence,
To practise and conspire against my peace, —
Had either of these but opened, I had paused.
But it was she the hag, she that brought hell
For a dowry with her to her husband's house,
She the mock-mother, she that made the match
And married me to perdition, spring and source
O' the fire inside me that boiled up from heart
To brain and hailed the Fury gave it birth, —
Violante Comparini, she it was,
With the old grin amid the wrinkles yet,
Opened: as if in turning from the Cross,
With trust to keep the sight and save my soul,
I had stumbled, first thing, on the serpent's head
Coiled with a leer at foot of it.
There was the end!
Then was I rapt away by the impulse, one
Immeasurable everlasting wave of a need
To abolish that detested life. 'T was done:
You know the rest and how the folds o' the thing,
Twisting for help, involved the other two
More or less serpent-like: how I was mad,
Blind, stamped on all, the earth-worms with the asp,
And ended so."

Guido tries to make it evident that his act was that of a man careless of life. He claims that if he had thought of his own safety he could

have hired bravos to commit the murder, or silently put his enemies out of the way by poison. So indifferent was he as to the result of his action that he took no pains to secure the warrant which would have given him the right to hire a conveyance to take him quickly to a place of safety. "Clearly my life was valueless." But since he has committed the deed he is himself again. "Health is returned and sanity of soul," and he feels the instinct that bids him save his life. He appeals to his judges to vindicate his primal right to act as he did. He then bids them "Take my whole life, not this last act alone" and asks "What has Society to charge me with?" He is a Count, and he has given his life to the service of the church. His last patron was a cardinal whom he left "unconvicted of a fault," and who, "by way of gratitude," had aided him in the matter of the marriage. He had in vain asked the court to annul the marriage, but he has "allowance for a husband's right." He has, it is true, been charged with exceeding that right. Such acts, he says "as I thought just, my wife called cruelty." She had carried her complaints to the Archbishop and to the Governor of Arezzo, and they, with full knowledge of the facts "confirmed authority in its wholesome exercise."

Some say that their decision was influenced by

friendship, hereditary alliance, prejudice for the name of a Franceschini, that could not be urged in this court. There are those who may say that the decision of his judges against him was caused by the popular clamor. He pleads also that he has only executed in his deed what the court had declared in a milder and less emphatic way, representing and carrying out its essential thought. The punishment of the court inflicted upon Pompilia and Caponsacchi showed that it deemed them guilty. If they were not wholly guilty then the court had no right to punish them. He calls the attention of his judges to the fact that the court in Tuscany had condemned Pompilia to imprisonment for life — while the court in Rome had inflicted only a nominal punishment upon Caponsacchi for the "breach of the priestly vow." He asks the court then to absolve him, the "law's executant."

Guido then gives the reasons why he should live. First, there is his mother whom he wishes to care for in her old age.

> "Let her come break her heart upon my breast
> Not on the blank stone of my nameless tomb!"

Then his brothers need help, and he also wishes to "lift up the youth and innocence" of his son Gaetano. Guido, however, does not make the slip, which some interpreters say he does, by

admitting that Gaetano is his son, and thus implying Pompilia's innocence and the inexcusableness of her murder. He is too much on his guard for that: he speaks of him as one "whom law makes mine," or as one who may be his by "miraculous mercy." At the close of his defence Guido represents himself as a self-sacrificing defender of the social sanctities:

"And when, in times made better through your brave
Decision now, — might but Utopia be! —
Rome rife with honest women and strong men,
Manners reformed, old habits back once more,
Customs that recognize the standard worth, —
The wholesome household rule in force again,
Husbands once more God's representative,
Wives like the typical Spouse once more, and Priests
No longer men of Belial, with no aim
At leading silly women captive, but
Of rising to such duties as yours now, —
Then will I set my son at my right-hand
And tell his father's story to this point,
Adding, 'The task seemed superhuman, still
I dared and did it, trusting God and law:
And they approved of me: give praise to both!'
And if, for answer, he shall stoop to kiss
My hand, and peradventure start thereat, —
I engage to smile 'That was an accident
I' the necessary process, — just a trip
O' the torture-irons in their search for truth, —
Hardly misfortune, and no fault at all.' "

In considering the character of Count Guido, we must remember that he is speaking at his

own trial, aware that every word he says is weighed by his judges. He is anxious to appear at his very best. What, then, does his speech tell us of himself? He is evidently proud of his family, which if not the oldest is admitted by all to be next to the oldest in Tuscany. He is deeply touched by the poverty into which it has fallen. He suffers because of the exposures made of the little economies of his home, — how his mother makes

> "— the brocade strips o' the seamy side
> O' the wedding gown buy raiment for a year."

how she dresses up the lamb's head with her own hands and how the wine used is three parts water. He is tortured by the gossip of the town which reports that he beats his wife. His whole soul writhes at the thought of his marriage to Pompilia, who drew "breath first mid Rome's worst rankness" through "the deed of a drab and a rogue." The imputation of dishonor to a member of his family — his younger brother — revolts his nature, so that he cries, "must I burn my lips with the blister of a lie." He also seems deeply religious and begins his speech, in the most approved orthodox form, "In the name of the indivisible Trinity." All this may, of course, have been assumed, and must not be taken too

seriously. His real character comes out when he attempts to extenuate his course of conduct. He knows he is censured because he had bought a young girl by means of his title, as if flesh and blood were a ware. He ought, it is said, to be ashamed of such an avowal. But Guido does not think so. "What," he declares, is "Franceschinihood" worth if it cannot be bartered for something? Deny that titles have a market value, and no one would care to have them. Why should one work for fifty years to obtain a title, if it could not serve to secure a "girl's hand" or a "fool's purse"? If titles had no value in the market it would have been better for him to have spent his life as a "dancer or a prizer," trades that pay.

"On the other hand, bid this buffoonery cease,
Admit that honour is a privilege,
The question follows, privilege worth what?
Why, worth the market-price, — now up, now down,
Just so with this as with all other ware:
Therefore essay the market, sell your name,
Style and condition to who buys them best!"

People have often acted upon this theory, but it has seldom been set forth in such blunt and brutal fashion. Titles, no doubt, do have a money value, but Guido declares they have nothing more. He has no perception of the honor

which is above all price, and he is incapable of seeing that while his position is a recognition of past services, it also entails an obligation to the performance of present duties. It is strange that a man so proud of his family name should be willing to degrade it into a ware to be sold to the highest bidder; because the moment titles become purchasable, they are no better than any other article in the market. But Guido is not content with the reduction of his title into a marketable commodity; he also reveals himself as a man to whom truth is not sacred. He has no sense of its intrinsic value. He is accused of "gilding fact with fraud" in the matter of the marriage; he had made himself richer than he really was. In reply he virtually says that that is of no consequence. He had carried out the essence of the bargain, had given what he said he would give and what the other parties really wanted. What he said about his fortune was but

> "A flourish round the figures of a sum,
> For fashion's sake that deceives nobody."

But it did deceive poor Pietro and Violante, and it was meant to deceive them.

When Guido is charged by the court with having written the letter attributed to her, he admits that he had caused her to trace the char-

acters which he himself had first written, but he seeks to free himself from blame by the plea that he had induced her to do what she ought to have done. He was like the priest who makes the palsied finger cross the forehead at the critical time, or who answers for the babe at its baptism. In these cases, however, only good was meant to the persons for whom these things were done, while in his case what he assumed to do for Pompilia meant harm to her and to those whom she loved.

Another example of Guido's disregard of truth is disclosed in his account of the letters which he alleged had passed between Pompilia and Caponsacchi, and which, he declared, had been found in the room of the inn where they had been overtaken and apprehended. He notices the denial of their authorship which had been made by them both, but he gives no proof to show that they did write them. He merely tells a story to illustrate his thought that of course they must make a denial of some kind, and passes on to something else. The whole case rested upon the authorship of these letters, and if Guido had felt certain that his wife and the priest had written them he would not have passed over them so lightly. If he knew they were forgeries, he had no right to use them. His treatment of

them only shows more clearly that he never hesitated to subordinate the truth to his own purpose.

Guido discloses himself as a man who is always conscious of his rights but never of his duties. In all his discussion of marriage he remembers the obligations imposed by it upon Pompilia, but he altogether forgets his obligations to her. He complains that his wife "violated her pact," that she did not act as a wife should, but he never once raises the question whether he had acted as, according to his vows made in marriage, he should have acted towards his wife. He illustrates his relation to Pompilia as that of an order to a monk. If he enters it and finds its ways different from what he expected; if he had fancied "Francis' manna meant roast quails," and so revolts against its regimen, he must not hope to have the order change its rules for his convenience, but rather expect punishment for his refusal to conform to them. But here Guido forgets one side of the matter, the right of the monk to demand that his order shall do what, in its rules, it promises to do. If the monastic institution violates its duty to the monk it must expect to be called to account for it. All this Guido leaves out of his consideration.

Then again he treats Pompilia as if she were

wholly free in her choice of a husband. If this were so, then she had no right to blame him for being what he was. It could be said to her, "You knew him, and chose to take him for a husband." Now Guido's friends say to him,

> "The fact is you are forty-five years old,
> Nor very comely even for that age:
> Girls must have boys."

And he replies: "Why, let girls say so then." He utterly ignores the fact that his wife had no more choice in her marriage than a lamb has about being carried to the shambles. He is very clear as to what is due to himself. He expects from the bride loyalty and obedience, and he cries

> "With a wife I look to find all wifeliness,
> As when I buy, timber and twig, a tree —
> I buy the song o' the nightingale inside."

But he has not a word to say of what a wife had a right to look for in a husband. So it is throughout the whole defence of Count Guido Franceschini. Such is the art of Browning that in spite of himself he reveals what he essentially is. His defence is an unconscious accusation of himself.

CHAPTER VII

CAPONSACCHI

GIUSEPPE MARIA CAPONSACCHI is the young priest in whose company Pompilia fled to Rome. He comes before the court in a state of great excitement and indignation. Here he is, he says, to tell the court the story, at the telling of which, only six months ago, the judges had smiled, as if to say

"The sly one, all this we are bound believe!
Well, he can say no other than what he says.
We have been young, too, — come, there 's greater guilt."

For this story he had received the jocular punishment of exile to Civita Vecchia; and now they come and tell him that Pompilia is dead or dying, murdered by the husband from whom he had tried to save her. They had told him he need not meddle, law would care for her, and here is the result. The story that they had asked him to tell them "seems to fill the universe with sight and sound," but let him be

> "the hollow rock, condense
> The voice o' the sea and wind, interpret you
> The mystery of this murder."

The court had seen the beginning of this affair, and why should it be surprised at the end?

He had himself foreseen it and tried to prevent it; but had been rebuked and, like an overzealous hound, "kicked, for his pains, to his kennel." Now, he cries, the judges want his help, and are ready to rehabilitate him and recognize his true value; but Pompilia, "the glory of life, the beauty of the world, the splendor of heaven," is "fast dying." Kindness to him does not "remit one death-bed pang to her." Nevertheless, he will help them, and even burn out his soul in showing them the truth. His part is done, but he will place Pompilia before them as she really was. He will restrain himself. Calmness will help her and so he says:

> "Calm I 'll keep as monk that croons
> Transcribing battle, earthquake, famine, plague,
> From parchment to his cloister's chronicle."

He then gives an account of his family and his life experience up to the time when he first saw Pompilia. His family was old and noble, one of the greatest in the city of Arezzo. It had rendered great service in the past, and his great-uncle, who was a bishop, had saved the city from destruction and had been an example of humility and self-sacrifice. Caponsacchi had studied for the priesthood with reason to expect advance-

ment in the church. But when he came to take the vow he felt himself too weak to keep it and would have withdrawn. The bishop remonstrated with him, and showed him that there was an "easier sense" in which the vow was to be regarded, declaring that the church made at present quite other demands than in the days of the confessors and martyrs.

> "Saint Paul has had enough and to spare, I trow,
> Of ragged run-away Onesimus:
> He wants the right-hand with the signet-ring
> Of King Agrippa, now, to shake and use."

The church, he declared, had need of men of the world with winning manners and poetic gifts. So, Caponsacchi says, he became a priest and performed the usual duties of his office with those of a man of the world. He heeded the advice of his bishop to pay his respects to certain ladies, and to acquire a "genteel manner," "a polished presence," and tact.

Then Caponsacchi gives an account of his first sight of Pompilia, as she appeared with her husband at the theatre — "tall, beautiful, strange and sad." She broke upon his vision like a picture of Rafael. As he stared at her, his friend, the Canon Conti, cousin of Guido, tossed some comfits to her, making it appear as if Caponsacchi had thrown them. Conti promised to

introduce Caponsacchi later, but the next day, at mass, Conti informed him that Guido did not wish to know him, — and advised him not to make Guido jealous because, as it was, he beat Pompilia. Caponsacchi had better devote himself to Light-skirts or the great dame. Caponsacchi tried to take the advice but became disgusted with both ladies, and resolved to attend faithfully to his priestly duties. His bishop, alarmed at his conduct, asked him if he were turning Molinist, to which Caponsacchi replied, "what if I turned Christian?" He then asked permission to go to Rome, where he could live alone and look into his heart a little. To all his friends he announced his intention of going to Rome.

Caponsacchi then gives an account of the visits made to him by the woman messenger, who ostensibly came from Pompilia, but who, he suspected, really came from Guido. The letter said that she to whom he had lately thrown the comfits in the theatre had a warm heart, and loved him, and bade him visit her house on an evening when her husband would be away at his villa of Vittiano. To this Caponsacchi made reply: "What made you marry your hideous husband?" In this way, he repaid Guido for his transparent trick. The next day

another letter came from her, by the same messenger, reproaching him for his cruelty, and asking only for a fragment of his love. She had heard that he was going to Rome, and asked him to take her with him because she was wretched in her home and her husband was a monster. The letter also stated that he need not write, but that she was ever "at the window of her room, over the terrace, at the *Ave*." To this he replied:

> "I am a priest, and you are wedded wife,
> Whatever kind of brute your husband proves."

Here, he has made Guido, "the cheat and spy," "anticipate hell's worm once more." Still the letters continued to come to which he returned always the same answer. At last one came, as from Pompilia, warning him that her husband suspected him and begging him to stay away from the window. To this he replied that if it pleased him, he would pass the street that eve since the street belonged to all. He determined to walk that way in the hope that he might call Guido out of his hiding place, and say to him "what a man thinks of a thing like you." But as he passed the window, lo! there appeared Pompilia with the "great, grave, griefful air" of "Our Lady of all the Sorrows." She vanished,

then reappeared and addressed him. She reproached him for the letters which, she had been told, had come from him, and which had been read to her. But she was in sore need of help; her parents had abandoned her, her husband hated her, and she must go to Rome. He had come upon her like a thief, but even a thief had "said the last kind word to Christ," and he too might render her the service she needed much. Now that she had looked into his eyes she knew he neither intended wrong nor wrote the letters, and that he was true. Caponsacchi then promised to do the service she wished, and "recognized her at potency of truth."

But in the evening, as he began to think it over, and to realize all that his promise meant, a new vision of life broke in upon him. His heart urged him one way, while the voice of his church urged him the other.

"I' the grey of dawn it was I found myself
Facing the pillared front of the Pieve — mine,
My church: it seemed to say for the first time
'But am not I the Bride, the mystic love
O' the Lamb, who took thy plighted troth, my priest,
To fold thy warm heart on my heart of stone
And freeze thee nor unfasten any more?
This is a fleshly woman, — let the free
Bestow their life-blood, thou art pulseless now!
. . . . . .
Leave that live passion, come be dead with me!'"

Perhaps, he thought, it was best for him to trust to God to help her, without any interference on his part, without any scandal on hers. So he went about the usual duties of the church, and then returned to his home. But then the thought flashed across his mind that Pompilia might think he had failed her, just as the Governor and Archbishop had failed her, because he feared. She must not be allowed to think that of him, and besides, it was his duty as a priest "to advise her seek help at the source, above all, not despair."

He went to her: she reproached him and again appealed to him for aid. He consented to give it and indicated the course she should pursue. Through the day he made all the arrangements, and at midnight Pompilia entered into the carriage, and he addressed the coachman:

> "By San Spirito,
> To Rome, as if the road burned underneath!
> Reach Rome, then hold my head in pledge, I pay
> The run and the risk to heart's content!"

Caponsacchi describes the journey, the incidents by the way, and the words that Pompilia spoke.

> "Each incident
> Proves, I maintain, that action of the flight
> For the true thing it was."

For the first hour they were silent in the darkness, like "two martyrs somewhere in a tomb"

who wait "the last day, but so fearless and so safe." In the morning Caponsacchi told Pompilia that they had passed Perugia and were now opposite Assisi — and in answer to her question, how long since they had left Arezzo, he said "Years — and certain hours beside." He related an incident which shows how anxious she was not to delay a moment on the way and he recalled a remark of hers that she was fearful now because her soul no longer knew pain. Then he remembers her inquiry as to how he had learned to serve women and whether men were not often as unhappy in their strength as women in their weakness. At another time, he says, she wanted to know why he smiled at the great gate of some city; and he told her, not because she would understand, but because she asked him. Again, when they had heard the *angelus*, she bade him read Gabriel's song, the lesson, and the little prayer to Raphael, "proper for us travellers." At Foligno he wished her to rest but she cried: "On to Rome, on, on!"

They travelled all that night, and through it she moaned low, and waved something away that seemed to menace her.

"Then I,
'Why in my whole life I have never prayed!
Oh, if the God, that only can, would help!

Am I his priest with power to cast out fiends?
Let God arise and all his enemies
Be scattered.' By morn there was peace, no sigh
Out of the deep sleep."

When they were within twelve miles of Rome, and he rejoiced because their journey was so nearly over, she seemed to dread the interruption and said: "I want no face nor voice that change and grow unkind." And he says: "That I liked, that was the best thing she said." At another place where they stopped, he put Pompilia in the care of a woman with a child and asked her to comfort her. Pompelia thanked him for the good it had done her and said: "This is a whole night's rest and how much more!" Here, too, she asked him if he thought she had done amiss in making the effort to flee from Guido, and called him "friend." As they drove on from here she wandered in her mind and addressed him as Gaetano, — and he ordered the driver to stop no more but to

"struggle through!
Then drench her in repose though death's self pour
The plenitude of quiet."

At last, he continues, they reached Castelnuovo, in sight of Rome. He would have driven on but Pompilia

" screamed out, 'No, I must not die!
Take me no farther, I should die: stay here!

I have more life to save than mine!'
She swooned.
We seemed safe: what was it foreboded so?
Out of the coach into the inn I bore
The motionless and breathless pure and pale
Pompilia, — bore her through a pitying group
And laid her on a couch, still calm and cured
By deep sleep of all woes at once. The host
Was urgent. 'Let her stay an hour or two!
Leave her to us, all will be right by morn.'
Oh! my foreboding! But I could not choose.
I paced the passage, kept watch all night long.
I listened, — not one movement, not one sigh.
'Fear not: she sleeps so sound!' they said: but I
Feared, all the same, kept fearing more and more,
Found myself throb with fear from head to foot,
Filled with a sense of such impending woe,
That, at first pause of night, pretence of gray,
I made my mind up it was morn. 'Reach Rome,
Lest hell reach her! A dozen miles to make,
Another long breath, and we emerge!' I stood
I' the court-yard, roused the sleepy grooms. 'Have out
Carriage and horse, give haste, take gold!' said I.
While they made ready in the doubtful morn, —
'T was the last minute, — needs must I ascend
And break her sleep; I turned to go.
And there
Faced me Count Guido, there posed the mean man
As master, — took the field, encamped his rights,
Challenged the world: there leered new triumph, there
Scowled the old malice in the visage bad
And black o' the scamp."

Count Guido made his charge against him, and while Caponsacchi was waiting, and still

had the opportunity to gripe him by the throat and end his career, officers appeared on either hand and placed him under arrest. Then the room of Pompilia, where she was still sleeping, was entered. She awoke, she started up, and when she saw her husband,

"'Away from between me and hell,' she cried:
'Hell for me, no embracing any more!
I am God's, I love God, God — whose knees I clasp,
Whose utterly most just award I take,
But bear no more love-making devils: hence!'"

She seized the sword of Guido, and would have slain him with it, had not the police interfered. She was held by them, and the room was searched. Then Caponsacchi demanded trial for himself and Pompilia before the Roman court:

"I demand that the Church I serve, decide
Between us, right the slandered lady there.
A Tuscan noble, I might claim the Duke:
A priest, I rather choose the Church, — bid Rome
Cover the wronged with her inviolate shield."

Caponsacchi reviews the different accusations made against him at the trial which followed, and the replies he had made. What of the letters of Pompilia to him? How was it that one who was innocent and a stranger to him could write such a page?

"'She wrote it,'" he says, "'when the Holy Father wrote
The bestiality that posts thro' Rome,
Put in his mouth by Pasquin.'"

What about the answers to her letters? They are clumsy mimics of his own character, as likely to be Bembo's as his own. He wrote the prose in these letters when St. John wrote the "tract *De Tribus.*" How came the letters to be found in his room in the inn after his departure? Because there were none to be found in his presence. What had he to say of the clandestine visits to the house of Guido? As well might it be said that he flew to the moon on a broomstick. The witness to these visits was a courtesan, and her testimony was worthless. What of the testimony of Borsi the coachman who said that during the flight there were "kissings in the coach, — frequent, frenetic"? The coachman said that after several weeks of sharp imprisonment.

This was the defence he had made on his trial but the court appeared to have no faith in his innocence. He must, it thought, be a little in the wrong; he was human, but then Potiphar pressed him too hard to do anything much out of the way. Hence the jocular punishment about which his friends only laughed. He was sent to Civita Vecchia. Now the murder had opened their eyes. So after all he had been a real St. George and Guido "a real dragon breathing flame." So, at last, they had seen the spirit of Guido manifesting itself and discovered that he had forged

the letters of which much had been made. As for himself if he had been conscious of guilt, why should he have fled from Arezzo?

> "What need of flight, what were the gain therefrom
> But just damnation, failure or success?"

In the whole flight they had not stopped anywhere an hour, or diverged a step from the right road.

The court by its decision in Pompilia's case had shown that it believed she had good cause for her flight; if the end was allowable then why not the means used to that end. He is done with being judged; he knows himself "guiltless in thought, word, and deed." He will avow that he "was blessed by the revelation of Pompilia" — and bids them make the most of it. Then he pronounces an invective against Guido:

"But for Count Guido, — you must counsel there!
I bow my head, bend to the very dust,
Break myself up in shame of faultiness.
I had him one whole moment, as I said —
As I remember, as will never out
O' the thoughts of me, — I had him in arm's reach
There — as you stand, Sir, now you cease to sit, —
I could have killed him ere he killed his wife,
And did not: he went off alive and well
And then effected this last feat — through me!
Me — not through you — dismiss that fear! 'T was you
Hindered me staying here to save her, — not
From leaving you and going back to him
And doing service in Arezzo. Come,

Instruct me in procedure! I conceive —
In all due self-abasement might I speak —
How you will deal with Guido: oh, not death!
Death, if it let her life be: otherwise
Not death, — your lights will teach you clearer! I
Certainly have an instinct of my own
I' the matter: bear with me and weigh its worth!
Let us go away — leave Guido all alone
Back on the world again that knows him now!
I think he will be found (indulge so far!)
Not to die so much as slide out of life,
Pushed by the general horror and common hate
Low, lower, — left o' the very ledge of things,
I seem to see him catch convulsively
One by one at all honest forms of life,
At reason, order, decency and use —
To cramp him and get foothold by at least;
And still they disengage them from his clutch.
'What, you are he, then, had Pompilia once
And so forwent her? Take not up with us!'
And thus I see him slowly and surely edged
Off all the table-land whence life upsprings
Aspiring to be immortality,
As the snake, hatched on hill-top by mischance,
Despite his wriggling, slips, slides, slidders down
Hill-side, lies low and prostrate on the smooth
Level of the outer place, lapsed in the vale:
So I lose Guido in the loneliness,
Silence and dusk, till at the doleful end,
At the horizontal line, creations verge,
From what just is to absolute nothingness —
Whom is it, straining onward still, he meets?
What other man deep further in the fate,
Who, turning at the prize of a footfall
To flatter him and promise fellowship,
Discovers in the act a frightful face —

Judas, made monstrous by much solitude!
The two are at one now! Let them love their love
That bites and claws like hate, or hate their hate
That mops and mows and makes as it were love!
There, let them each tear each in devil's-fun,
Or fondle this the other while malice aches —
Both teach, both learn detestability!
Kiss him the kiss, Iscariot! Pay that back,
That smatch o' the slaver blistering on your lip,
By the better trick, the insult he spared Christ —
Lure him the lure o' the letters, Aretine!
Lick him o'er slimy-smooth with jelly-filth
O' the verse-and-prose pollution in love's guise!
The cockatrice is with the basilisk!
There let them grapple, denizens o' the dark,
Foes or friends, but indissolubly bound,
In this one spot out of the ken of God
Or care of man, for ever and ever more!"

After this fiery utterance Caponsacchi becomes conscious of being too deeply moved, and that the court may have reason to be vexed, or even to imagine he was in love with Pompilia. He cites an incident in their journey to show that this was not so, and declares that she was not beautiful in any artistic sense. She had, he says, the face of one who bore an invisible crown "of martyr and saint," or the face of one "careful for a whole world of sin and pain." He notes the fact that Guido would not have vindicated his honor if he had escaped as he had hoped to do: for in that case no one would have known

that he had killed Pompilia. He argues that the court only imputed a technical offence to him. Because of friends who think it may make some difference to his defence, — he brings out the fact that Pompilia sought him only when all others, Conti and Guillichini, had failed to respond to her appeal for help. What had these gained by their refusal? Conti had been poisoned, and Guillichini sent to the galleys.

The courts of Arezzo had convicted himself and Pompilia for breaking in and stealing, but the courts of Rome could not so easily be deceived. The lie which Guido got Arezzo to receive, he did not dare to bring to Rome. Caponsacchi says he chooses Rome, and above all the good Augustinian monk, who had heard Pompilia's confession, and had declared he had never heard one, "so sweet and true and pure and beautiful." He then seeks to calm himself with the reflection that he is as good as out of life, and has only the duty of a priest; who has had a deep experience of life to perform.

"I do but play with an imagined life
Of who, unfettered by a vow, unblessed
By the higher call, — since you will have it so, —
Leads it companioned by the woman there.
To live, and see her learn, and learn by her,
Out of the low obscure and petty world —
Or only see one purpose and one will

Evolve themselves i' the world, change wrong to right:
To have to do with nothing but the true,
The good, the eternal — and these, not alone
In the main current of the general life,
But small experiences of every day,
Concerns of the particular hearth and home:
To learn not only by a comet's rush
But a rose's birth, — not by the grandeur, God —
But the comfort, Christ. All this, how far away!
Mere delectation, meet for a minute's dream! —
Just as a drudging student trims his lamp,
Opens his Plutarch, puts him in the place
Of Roman, Grecian; draws the patched gown close,
Dreams, 'Thus should I fight, save or rule the world!'—
Then smilingly, contentedly, awakes
To the old solitary nothingness.
So I, from such communion, pass content . . .
O great, just, good God! Miserable me!"

The first impression made by the account of Caponsacchi is that of its straightforwardness and reality. It is evident that he has nothing to evade or conceal. He opens his whole life for inspection. He narrates in detail every incident of his relations with Pompilia in the confident assurance that every one will recognize them at their true worth, will discern that they are not "coprolite" but "Parian." The first note of his character is sincerity. He never pretends to himself to be what he is not.

It is clear that he did not enter the priesthood simply to earn a living or to get some advantage. The memory of a saintly great-uncle had inspired

him to walk in his footsteps. He is conscientious in his studies, and strives to make himself worthy of his high calling. He had, however, not realized all that priesthood involved, and so when the vow was read to him he stops short, awestruck, and cries out:

> "How shall holiest flesh
> Engage to keep such vow inviolate,
> How much less mine, — I know myself too weak,
> Unworthy. Choose a worthier, stronger man!"

Here was one who did not wish to be a sham. He expected to keep his word when it had once been given. An insincere man would have felt no such compunctions, the brothers of Guido did not. Many would have promised without serious thought or with mental reservation. Caponsacchi's unwillingness to take the vow reveals him as a man who believed that words meant something and that promises were made to be kept. It is true that he consented to take the vow when it was interpreted in a larger and looser way; but the interpretation was not his own but that of his superior in the church, and was, no doubt, generally accepted. In pursuing the course which he afterward did as priest and man of the world he was conscious of no violated promise: he was simply doing all that was expected of him. It is true that Caponsacchi did

not show himself a spiritual hero. Such an one would have said "either the vow means something or nothing and in either case I can have nothing to do with it." But he did, under the circumstances, show himself to be a man who would make no false pretences, a man who was real and genuine. No doubt the highest kind of man would not have allowed himself to be persuaded to pursue the course of conduct he did, but a man a little less sincere than he would have required no persuasion.

Caponsacchi reveals courage. Farther on we shall see that he has moral courage, but here I speak only of that which is physical. No one can fail to see the indications of it throughout the poem. When he declined the invitation which Pompilia was supposed to have sent him, he said to himself:

"Last month, I had doubtless chosen to play the dupe,
Accepted the mock-invitation, kept
The sham appointment, cudgel beneath cloak,
Prepared myself to pull the appointer's self
Out of the window from his hiding-place. . . .
Such had seemed once a jest permissible:
Now I am not i' the mood."

Again when another letter came beseeching him to stay away from the window of Guido's home, he replied:

"You raise my courage, or call up
My curiosity, who am but man.
Tell him he owns the palace, not the street."

Again when after his flight with Pompilia he was overtaken, Caponsacchi faced Guido and the rabble around him with an impassive front. Although appearances were against him, and all around were ready to believe Guido's malicious accusation, he never flinched for a moment, and as a result, came off victorious. The only fear he shows is the fear that Pompilia may think he is a coward. At first he hesitated to do as he had promised. He tried to make himself believe that God would aid her and work a miracle on her behalf. Then there came the thought that she might think

"I fear
The world now, fear the Archbishop, fear perhaps Count Guido."

His real fear is that the reputation of Pompilia may suffer through his attempt to rescue her. Could he save her and not endanger that? Could she be rescued without a breath of scandal? So long as that seemed possible, he hesitated. When, at last, no other course was open, he acted like the man he was, unmindful of everything save the deliverance of the lady from the home, which to her had become a hell.

Dr. Johnson said he loved a good hater. If

he had lived long enough to read *The Ring and the Book*, and to study Caponsacchi, I think he would have found in him a man after his own heart. I know of no one in all literature who shows greater capacity for indignation. In that lower form of hate which consists merely in personal ill will, others excel him. He was as good-natured as Guido was evil natured. He took people pretty much as he found them and evidently viewed them with large-hearted tolerance. But there must have been in him all the time, though hidden even from himself, a capacity for hating what was mean, a capacity without which a man can never be a power for righteousness. The source of real goodness in a man or woman lies in the intensity of his disposition to cleanse the face of the earth from all that smuts and besmirches it. This Caponsacchi had in full measure. It discloses itself in the taunting tone of his letters, in response to those which seemed to come from Pompilia, but which he felt sure came from Guido himself.

> "Let the incarnate meanness, cheat and spy,
> Mean to the marrow of him, make his heart
> His food, anticipate hell's worm once more!"

It is evident in his regret that when he had had Guido within arms' length, he had not been more prompt:

" — one quick spring,
One great good satisfying gripe, and lo!
There had he lain abolished with his lie, . . .
A spittle wiped off from the face of God."

But no one who reads Caponsacchi's invective against Guido, one of the most tremendous utterances of concentrated contempt and hate in all literature, will need any other proof of his capacity for indignation. All the other instances I have cited are mere mutterings of the storm which here breaks forth in cyclonic fury, and by its awful power sweeps Guido before it.

"out of the ken of God
Or care of man, for ever and ever more!"

Such a soul has in itself something of the spirit of Him who will overturn and overturn until righteousness is established in the earth.

Combined with this disposition to hate the evil, we find what perhaps is the other and better side of the same feeling, a confident trust in the good, which no appearances to the contrary could destroy. He is a symbol of the completest faith of the human heart. The faith of Caponsacchi rested on no proof, and was contradicted by all the available evidence. He had seen Pompilia only once, and that was enough. From that moment he "recognized her, at potency of truth." Then came the letters, that, if accepted

as Pompilia's, would make her vile, but his faith was not lessened by them. It enabled him to see through the mean devices of Guido and he did not doubt her purity for a moment. As well might one tell him that a serpent had proceeded from the mouth of Raphael's Madonna as to tell him that these letters came from her. When he saw Pompilia in the window, even as the lying letter said she would be found at such an hour, his faith rose superior to his sight, and he says:

> "I thought — 'Just so:
> It was herself, they have set her there to watch —
> Stationed to see some wedding-band go by,
> On fair pretence that she must bless the bride,
> Or wait some funeral with friends wind past,
> And crave peace for the corpse that claims its due.
> She never dreams they used her for a snare.
> And now withdraw the bait has served its turn.' "

Then we see the kindly helpful spirit of the man. He thinks of himself as one who has a "score of strengths with no use for them," and then of Pompilia who has none. Only a kind heart would reason so. These are some of the qualities of the man at the time when Pompilia appealed to him for help. He was not the man he afterward became through her influence, but he must have had the possibilities of his later manhood in him. These might never have awakened, as they did, into fullness of life and

power but for his experience with her, but unless they had already been there she would have availed no more for him than for others. It is not enough that the sunlight falls upon the earth; the earth must have the germs of life and beauty in its bosom.

It was the glory of Caponsacchi that there was that within him which made him quick to discern the revelation in Pompilia's life and words. He assures us that he was blessed by the revelation. The first sight of her lifted him above his care for common and trivial things. He saw "Light-skirts" in her real ugliness, and discerned the spiteful spirit of "the great dame." The bishop's table with its fine food and jovial conversation no longer attracted him. He found it now

> " more amusing to go pace at eve
> I' the Duomo, — watch the day's last gleam outside
> Turn, as into a skirt of God's own robe
> Those lancet-windows' jewelled miracle."

The old life faded away in the light of the new vision to which he was not disobedient.

The service which Pompilia asked him to render was one that called for the sacrifice of reputation. He was a priest, and if he hoped for promotion, as no doubt he did, there must be no spot on his name. He might well ask whether

he owed so costly a service to her. Why should he intervene when his superiors had refused to do so? Nobody could reproach him for declining to help her, while to do what she besought him would subject him to suspicion, if not condemnation, of the good and to the incredulous laughter of fools. Happiness and prosperity lay in the prescribed and usual course; the loss of all that was most precious to him was imminent if he took the unaccustomed and unusual way. No wonder that all through the spring night he realized that he was passing from an old to a new form of life! He was learning that he could bear blame more easily than blameworthiness; that there is something better in this world than happiness; that to do his duty, however hard it might be, for one however humble, is the surest way to the highest life. In some way he had always thought so, but now he knew in his own experience that "The very immolation made the bliss." This knowledge endowed him with that rarest of all courage, the courage to sacrifice reputation to character, to surrender the approval of man for the consciousness of right. He would rather be than to appear right.

In taking up the cause of Pompilia, Caponsacchi found also that he had been freed from bondage to the conventional. He was a priest,

consecrated to the service of his church; how dared he attempt any other service? The new mission seemed one which he had no right to undertake. The inward struggle must have been hard and long. The church seemed to stand in the way of the service which his heart bade him render. What he owed to the ecclesiastical institution conflicted with what he owed to the instinct of humanity. Should the pleading of a woman for deliverance mean more to him than the commands of the church to which he had sworn allegiance? The church's call was divine; that of the woman was humbly human. The questionings of his heart drove him beyond the forms and shadows of things to their core and substance. They compelled him to ask whether the church meant as much as it professed. He recalled that it had not stood in the way of his careless and indifferent action. It had allowed him to go on as he would until some living duty straight from the heart of things had appealed to him; and then it had begun to whine about his duty to it. Why should it have no word to say until some real work was demanded of him, and then all at once become urgent? It had been silent when he lived as a "fribbler and coxcomb"; it found voice to utter a denial only when he was moved to render a

human service. As between the two he preferred to obey the voice of God, which made itself heard in a woman's cry for help, rather than the scruples of the church which addressed him only in stereotyped phrases.

So Caponsacchi was able to divine the real obligation he was under. The instinct of his nature was wiser than the formal codes of the church. Because he was true he acted truly. Experience had taught him that the church was an echo rather than a voice. Often the two might, and did, sound the same note, but now that the two were not in accord, it remained for him to find "his freedom in responding to the real call of God." He learned that while there is a visible church that well serves to remind the world of the sanctities of the past, there is also a still, small voice which stirs the heart to serve the necessities of the present. He found deliverance from the conventional in his recognition of the actual. He made the discovery, which it is well for all of us to make, that conscience, in so far as it means obedience to the ordinary and usual, must be ignored, even disobeyed, if we would attain to the highest form of manhood or womanhood.

It is evident too that in his experience Caponsacchi had learned that the great deeds of the

world are as possible in the present as in the past. He and those before whom he had been tried thought a heroic duty was done by those who in former ages had rescued forlorn damsels in some crisis of their lives. Such service was called chivalrous, even sacred, and it was deemed worthy of all honor. When Saint George rescued the princess from the dragon, it was thought he had well earned the title of "saint." But here and now was a simple priest who had endangered what must have been dearer than life itself, to rescue a girl in Arezzo, whom her reputed parents had abandoned and whom her husband hated, from cruelty and shame. Was this so very different from the deeds of the ancient heroes and saints? Caponsacchi had learned to see that his deed was of the same piece with all the heroism and helpfulness of the past. Pompilia was as good as any princess, better than most of them. Her husband, Guido, was worse than the dragon whom Saint George overthrew, and his attempt to save her was no less worthy praise. Caponsacchi no longer saw his deed in its littleness, because it was done by himself in Arezzo, for one so humble, but in its greatness as a part of the manifestation of the love of God in human souls, in all places, in all ages, and for all who need. As he stands before his judges he reveals

his full consciousness of his right to place himself by the side of those who in past times had succored the forlorn and helpless.

"Yes,
I rise in your esteem, sagacious Sirs,
Stand up a renderer of reasons, not
The officious priest would personate Saint George
For a mock Princess in undragoned days.
What, the blood startles you? What, after all
The priest who needs must carry sword on thigh
May find imperative use for it? Then, there was
A Princess, was a dragon belching flame,
And should have been a Saint George also?"

CHAPTER VIII

POMPILIA

POMPILIA, who now speaks, appears in a very different light from the others to whose voices we have been listening. She is not defending herself against a charge of crime like Guido, nor is she "a friend of the court" like Caponsacchi. She is a dying girl who "sighs out" her pitiful story, not so much to vindicate herself, for she feels no need of that, as to place the man, who had risked all to save her, in the right light. The keynote of her narrative lies in these lines:

"Then, I must lay my babe away with God,
Nor think of him again, for gratitude.
Yes, my last breath shall wholly spend itself
In one attempt more to disperse the stain,
The mist from other breath fond mouths have made,
About a lustrous and pellucid soul:
So that, when I am gone but sorrow stays,
And people need assurance in their doubt
If God yet have a servant, man a friend,
The weak a saviour and the vile a foe, —
Let him be present, by the name invoked,
Guiseppe-Maria Caponsacchi!"

In her narrative there are no literary or historic allusions. Guido and Caponsacchi were men

acquainted with the world, its literature and art, and they reveal this knowledge in what they say, but there is nothing in Pompilia's story which indicates anything beyond the particular happenings of her own experience. She tells us about her church, San Lorenzo, and its curate Ottoboni, of her play with her friend, of the goat that was made to stand on four sticks, of the madman who seized her hand and proclaimed himself to be pope. She has no knowledge of the places through which she passed on her journey from Arezzo to Rome, or of the historic associations and memories of either city. Once she mentions the name of a famous physician, but only because he had visited her and given her some medicine which cured her childish ailment. Once she refers to the Molinists, but the word is put into her mouth by the Archbishop to whom she had gone for deliverance from her trouble. He says to her:

> "'For see —
> If motherhood be qualified impure,
> I catch you making God command Eve sin!
> —A blasphemy so like these Molinists',
> I must suspect you dip into their books.'"

When we remember that Pompilia could not read, we realize what a woodenhead the Archbishop must have been. Then the narrative has not the order and method which we find in that

of either Guido or Caponsacchi; it is the simple outpouring of a soul, to the loving hearts of the nuns, of her life experience, controlled by no other motive than the desire to right her friend. Her discourse cannot be analyzed. I shall, therefore, attempt only to indicate its general course and spirit.

Pompilia begins with the most simple facts of her life and tells us her age, the name of the church, San Lorenzo, in which she had been baptized and married, and her name in full, Francesca Camilla Vittoria Angela Pompilia Comparini. She has been the mother of a son, Gaetano, "exactly two weeks." She rejoices in the fact that her babe has been baptized and is "safe from being hurt," and she hopes that when he becomes a man and asks what his mother was like, some one will assure him that she was not like the girls of seventeen whom he will ordinarily see. Her name, she hopes, will keep her apart in his mind, from what girls are. Her son, she knows, will have no knowledge of his parents, nor will there be any one to care for him. For that reason she has given him the name of Gaetano, that he may have the help of a new saint after whom only a few, as yet, are named. She does not want him to know her sad story.

Everything in her experience has been a sur-

prise. Pietro and Violante had declared that they were not her parents. She had always supposed that husbands loved their wives, but Guido hated her. Then people persisted in saying that Caponsacchi was her lover. Her whole former life seems something apart from herself, unreal and fantastic. She recalls the incidents of a few days before, when, with her foster-parents, she sat by the fire and talked of the boy who had been given her, and what he would do when he was grown up. She tells how Pietro went out and then came back to speak of the sights he had seen, and how while he talked, and all were happy, — the end came.

She does not think that Pietro deserved punishment, and as for Violante she had done wrong, but what she had done seemed right to her and it was meant for the best. She had tried, too, to make all right by the marriage, although it was such a grief to give up one whom love had made her own. Perhaps, on the whole, it had been well; at any rate, now that she was dying everything seemed softened and bettered. As she leaves life, all the past fades away into calm. She had lived happily with her parents until the time of her marriage, about which at the time she understood nothing, and was bidden by her mother to be silent.

She relates how on a rainy day she was taken by her mother to San Lorenzo, and married there in the empty church, and how afterward life went on just the same, until she became the witness of the quarrel between Pietro and Guido, and realized that something "low, mean and underhand," had taken place. Violante, at last, consoled her with the promise of the high position she would occupy in Arezzo as the wife of a nobleman, and the statement that they were to be all together there.

Her memory of the four years she lived with her husband was almost a blank. During that time she was sustained by her prayer to God and her hope, that in answer to that prayer, some one would come to rescue her in her great need. She has really very little to forgive. Her husband had some right to feel aggrieved because no money came, as he had expected, with the marriage. Then it was hard for him to learn that she was not the child of Pietro and Violante, and in his anger at them, he revenged himself on her. She might have known what to do if she had been able to understand what he really wanted. But his plan was so different from anything she could imagine, that all she tried to do to please him only angered him the more. Aware, as she was, that there was no communion

of soul between herself and Guido she thought she ought not to live with him as his wife. But the Archbishop, whom she consulted, told her that she was to blame for thinking thus, and that her proposed course reflected discredit on Eve. Nor did he heed her complaint against the canon, Girolamo, Guido's younger brother. He bade her go back to her husband, and by her conduct towards him send the brother "back to book again." But although she obeyed the advice given her she did not lessen Guido's hatred of her or his brother's advances. She says: "Henceforth I asked God counsel not mankind."

When she saved herself by her flight with the priest people had said she showed herself the daughter of her shameless mother. This criticism made her feel that somehow her mother had been greatly wronged, and that she might have parted from her — the child she loved — because she wanted to save her from the fate which had befallen herself. But now, with the coming of her own child, she knew that God would care for him.

People, Pompilia says, speak of her relations with Caponsacchi as though he were blameworthy, and the thought of righting him, that others may see him, as she sees him, — "purity in quintessence," — gives her strength. She relates how

she came to know him. She had seen him at the theatre whither she had gone with her husband. As she was seated there, a twist of comfits was thrown into her lap. They seemed to come from Caponsacchi, but, as she regarded him, she felt sure he had not thrown them. Soon after, her cousin Conti came to her box and acknowledged as much. Guido, however, chose to believe that they came from Caponsacchi and that he was her lover. He called her a "wanton," "drew his sword, and feigned a thrust." She was so accustomed to this that she did not heed it, but repeated the mere truth and held her tongue. Guido declared that her *amour* with Caponsacchi was "town-talk" — and that he would kill him the next time he found him underneath his eaves.

Pompilia gives an account of the letters brought to her by the serving woman, who said they came from Caponsacchi — and explains how this maid, Margherita, tried to induce her to accept the proposals which, she said, were made in them. To all her suggestions, however, Pompilia was deaf until she bade her invite him to appear at her window that evening, and here she gives the motive which led her to do so. She had gone to bed one night, thinking:

" ' How good to sleep and so get nearer death ! ' —
When, what, first thing at daybreak, pierced the sleep

With a summons to me? Up I sprang alive,
Light in me, light without me, everywhere
Change!
. . . I stepped forth,
Stood on the terrace, — o'er the roofs, such sky!
My heart sang, 'I too am to go away,
I too have something I must care about,
Carry away with me to Rome, to Rome! . . .
I have my purpose and my motive too,
My march to Rome, like any bird or fly!
Had I been dead! How right to be alive!
Last night I almost prayed for leave to die,
Wished Guido all his pleasure with the sword
Or the poison, — poison, sword, was but a trick,
Harmless, may God forgive him the poor jest!
My life is charmed, will last till I reach Rome!
Yesterday, but for the sin, — ah, nameless be
The deed I could have dared against myself!
Now — see if I will touch an unripe fruit,
And risk the health I want to have and use!
Not to live, now, would be the wickedness, —
For life means to make haste and go to Rome
And leave Arezzo, leave all woes at once!'"

Before this she had gone to the Governor, the Archbishop, the holy friar, to Guillichini, and to Conti; she had besought them to help her and all had declined to do so. But Conti refers her to Caponsacchi, — "your true Saint George." As a last resort she turned now to him and bade the serving woman, to her great surprise, "Tell him to come." Somehow Pompilia felt sure of his coming. She cried:

"'He will come.'
And, all day, I sent prayer like incense up
To God the strong, God the beneficent,
God ever mindful in all strife and strait,
Who, for our own good, makes the need extreme,
Till at the last He puts forth might and saves.
An old rhyme came into my head and rang
Of how a virgin, for the faith of God,
Hid herself, from the Paynims that pursued,
In a cave's heart; until a thunderstone,
Wrapped in a flame, revealed the couch and prey
And they laughed — 'Thanks to lightning, ours at last!'
And she cried 'Wrath of God, assert His love!
Servant of God, thou fire, befriend His child!'
And lo, the fire she grasped at, fixed its flash,
Lay in her hand a calm cold dreadful sword
She brandished till pursuers strewed the ground,
So did the souls within them die away,
As o'er the prostrate bodies, sworded, safe,
She walked forth to the solitudes and Christ:
So should I grasp the lightning and be saved!"

When at her bidding Caponsacchi arrived, she appealed to him to take her with him to Rome, to her own people, — and so to save "Something that's trulier me than this myself." His answer was, "I am yours." After some delay the preparations were made for the flight and at the dawn of day they fled together. All that he had been to her and had done for her on the journey was a revelation of all that was good. Perhaps he was not one of the great saints, but he had done something of a saint's service for her and

so she cries, "This one heart brought me all the Spring." She relates all the kindly services he rendered, how at one place he told her "all about a brave man dead," and how, at another town which seemed as if it "would turn Arezzo's self," he put a new-born babe into her arms.

"I could believe himself by his strong will
Had woven around me what I thought the world
We went along in, every circumstance,
Towns, flowers and faces, all things helped so well!
For, through the journey, was it natural
Such comfort should arise from first to last?
As I look back, all is one milky way;
Still bettered more, the more remembered, so
Do new stars bud while I but search for old,
And fill all gaps i' the glory, and grow him —
Him I now see make the shine everywhere."

So it was until the dread morning when her husband and the world broke in upon her slumber at the inn and she saw her "angel helplessly held back," while Guido towered triumphant.

"then
Came all the strength back in a sudden swell,
I did for once see right, do right, give tongue
The adequate protest: for a worm must turn
If it would have its wrong observed by God.
I did spring up, attempt to thrust aside
That ice-block 'twixt the sun and me, lay low
The neutralizer of all good and truth."

She had borne the wrongs inflicted on herself and her parents and the possible harm to her un-

born child, but she could not bear to have her "angel's self made foul i' the face by the fiend that struck there." That was the reason why her first and last resistance was invincible. Then she learned that "Prayers move God; threats and nothing else move men." She "will not have the service fail"; her angel saved her. The judges had done right when they consigned her to the care of the nuns "who said and sung away the ugly past." Through his service her babe had been born in quiet of her parents' home.

> "It would not have peeped forth, the bird-like thing,
> Through that Arezzo noise and trouble: back
> Had it returned nor ever let me see!
> But the sweet peace cured all, and let me live
> And give my bird the life among the leaves
> God meant him!"

Yes: through what he had done she had been given the opportunity to think over her past and to allow "good premonitions" come to her unthwarted. Her child had been born "all in love, with naught to spoil the bliss." Now, as never before, she realized the meaning of God's birth and "how he grew like God in being born." As for her foster parents, "all is over, they see God." For her husband she gives him "for his good the life he takes!" — and she prays that he may "touch God's shadow and be healed." He has

rendered her a service in destroying a bond which was hateful to them both. As for her child: he will be the safer without father and mother, "through God who knows I am not by."

She is ready to "compose herself for God," recalling, as her last words, all that she owes to Caponsacchi — her "soldier-saint" — and she closes with the words:

> "My fate
> Will have been hard for even him to bear:
> Let it confirm him in the trust of God,
> Showing how holily he dared the deed!
> And, for the rest, — say, from the deed, no touch
> Of harm came, but all good, all happiness,
> Not one faint fleck of failure!
> . . . . . .
> Say, — I am all in flowers from head to foot!
> Say, — not one flower of all he said and did,
> Might seem to flit unnoticed, fade unknown,
> But dropped a seed, has grown a balsam-tree
> Whereof the blossoming perfumes the place
> At this supreme of moments!"

Pompilia remembers that Caponsacchi is a priest, and cannot marry. She thinks he would not marry if he could.

> "Marriage on earth seems such a counterfeit,
> Mere imitation of the inimitable:
> In heaven we have the real and true and sure.
> 'T is there they neither marry nor are given
> In marriage but are as the angels: right,
> Oh, how right that is, how like Jesus Christ
> To say that! . . .

Be as the angels rather, who, apart,
Know themselves into one, are found at length
Married, but marry never, no, nor give
In marriage; they are man and wife at once
When the true time is: here we have to wait
Not so long neither! Could we by a wish
Have what we will and get the future now,
Would we wish aught done undone in the past?
So, let him wait God's instant men call years;
Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,
Do out the duty! Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of His light
For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise."

In Pompilia we have a revelation of one whose pure beauty redeems the world in which she moved from universal blame. Without her in the poem, as without such souls in life, we should lose our hope in human kind. We need her perfect whiteness to hearten us, as she heartens the Pope, with the assurance that the world

"in the absolutest drench of dark, —
Ne'er wants a witness, some stray beauty-beam
To the despair of hell."

She is different in all respects from the other characters who reveal themselves in the poem. Guido and Caponsacchi are men acquainted with life. They have had some experience in affairs. Guido has been connected with the pontifical court for thirty years; he knows the men of position and power. Capon-

sacchi is the polished man of the world, and he occupies a dignified and influential place in the city of Arezzo. Through their speeches we are continually finding references to famous works of art, to the classic books of the nation, to the theologians of the church, and to the prevailing theological thought of the time. But Pompilia is only the girl wife, "only seventeen," and her portraiture is in perfect keeping with everything we know of her age, rank, and experience of life. She says nothing that contradicts these. Her speech in the poem does not contain a single literary allusion. There is not the slightest indication of any acquaintance with historic events, hardly a word that shows a knowledge of anything beyond her home and the happenings in the immediate neighborhood. She knows the way from the house of her father and mother to the church of San Lorenzo in Rome, and she speaks of her parents, the priest of the parish church, the "marble lion rushing from the wall," the goat that the man made to stand on four sticks, the madman who claimed to be Pope, the poor image of the Virgin, "thin white glazed clay," in the niche; the games she played with her little friend. That is all she knows of Rome; and she knows no more of Arezzo. Her husband's palace, the church, the theatre, and the

houses of Archbishop and Governor, and the few streets that lead from one to the other are all she tells us of a city — rich in memories of men famous in literature and art, in state and church. The great world of eminent men and memorable deeds was to her unknown. Reading might have widened her world, but Pompilia could not read, and all she says is limited by her experience of life. Once she refers to a famous physician, but she remembers him as the thin austere man who gave her the bitter dose that cured her childish ailment — "so ugly all the same." She mentions the Molinists, who were exciting attention in the religious world in her time, only because she happens to recall what the Archbishop said to her when she appealed to him for relief.

Pompilia, too, knows nothing of the places through which she journeys from Arezzo to Rome. Caponsacchi gives a description of every step of the way, — the name and character of each place, the time when they arrived and when they left. His is the narrative of an educated man. But Pompilia's story reveals her utter ignorance of places and times. If we knew about her in no other way, we could yet easily see from her account of the journey, that things outside herself made little or no impression upon her. There are only two distinct points in her mind, —

the home of her husband in Arezzo and the home of her reputed parents in Rome. Her only concern was to escape from the one, to find refuge in the other. She recalls with a vivid sense of gratitude all that Caponsacchi did for her and was to her on the way. She knows that — "this one heart brought me all the Spring," but of the journey all she can tell is,

> "Each place must have a name though I forget;
> How strange it was, — there where the plain begins
> And the small river mitigates its flow — "

An ignorant girl could not better describe her ignorance.

There are many indications of the artlessness and simplicity of Pompilia. The splendor of art does not impress her. Her child was born outside the walls and so had to be baptized at St. Paul's, the nearest church, of which she chirps:

> "A pretty church, I say no word against,
> Yet stranger-like, — while this Lorenzo seems
> My own particular place, I always say."

St. Paul's is one of the most beautiful churches in Christendom, but to Pompilia it is a "pretty church." Art is of no consequence to her compared with San Lorenzo, the church in which she felt at home. She amuses herself, just as

a child might, even in the presence of death, with the recitation of her names, "Francesca Camilla Vittoria Angela Pompilia Comparini." She calls her son Gaetano, because the saint after whom he was named was a recent one and had not grown weary like her own five saints, and so might take better care of him. Her faith is so simple, natural, and spontaneous that she can weave amusing fancies around it and still reverence it, not less, but all the more.

Pompilia makes no defence, and utters no denial. She is too conscious of her innocence to feel the need of asserting it. And she needs no defence; the simple unfolding of her life experience is enough. Others may plead and reason; she only tells what she knows. As one listens to her he finds it impossible to suspect her of any wrong. All that she says has the ring of truth in it. Her purpose in speaking is to vindicate the character of Caponsacchi, who had risked all to save her. She wants him to know that his service has not failed, and that through him God has enabled her to rise into a higher and better life. In all she says she reveals a soul that was animated by concern for others.

We might easily suppose that the experience of Pompilia would render her harsh and uncharitable in her judgments of her little world.

Who could blame her if it had? Almost everybody had failed her, and had been unfaithful to trust, as far as she was concerned. Her own mother had sold her before she was born. Her foster parents, whom she had been brought up to believe were her real parents, had publicly disowned her. Her husband had disregarded all the sanctities and even the decencies of the marriage relation, making her life a protracted martyrdom and ending with the murder. But in spite of all these things, her judgments are kindly and manifest the love that never fails. She finds some justification for every one, some motive at the heart of each which may lessen the blame attaching to each act. While she keenly realizes all the wrong that others have done her, and knows how bad it was, she has the perception which enables her to understand the impulse of good in the blameworthy deed. She says that Violante did wrong in buying her from her poor mother and passing her off as her own child to her husband. But then, she thinks, she meant well by it. Her own childhood was happier and better than it would otherwise have been and Old Pietro's days were fuller of sunshine because of the presence of a child in his home. Then Violante did not think she had really told a lie.

"She thought, moreover, real lies were lies told
For harm's sake; whereas this had good at heart."

Then, she thought, Violante had meant to atone for her fault by giving her in marriage, in which everything would be righted. To do this she had sacrificed the dearest affection of her heart. And so Pompilia declares:

"I know she meant all good to me, all pain
To herself, — since how could it be aught but pain
To give me up, so, from her very breast? —
. . . . . .
She meant well: has it been so ill i' the main?"

Pompilia's judgment of her poor unknown mother is equally tender and true. She imputes to her motives of which she herself is conscious. Might not she, terrible as the thought is, yield her Gaetano to save him, and so might not her mother have sold her to save her?

"If she sold, — what they call, sold — me her child —
I shall believe she hoped in her poor heart
That I at least might try be good and pure,
Begin to live untempted, not go doomed
And done with ere once found in fault, as she."

Even the miserable serving woman, Margherita, who sought to tempt her to evil, is not utterly condemned. To her, she says:

"Let it suffice I either feel no wrong
Or else forgive it, — yet you turn my foe!
The others hunt me and you throw a noose!"

She cannot find any goodness in Guido. For him she attempts no palliation, but she pardons him, and gives him the life he takes. Perhaps, after all, he had rendered a service, though he meant it not, in her murder. He had thus ended a relation which was essentially false. Her presence had always been an annoyance to him, therefore it will be well if they never meet again. Still, even in this soul, Pompilia believes there may be something to love. "I could not love him, but his mother did." Even for him, she thinks the presence of God may avail, and she prays that it may.

> "But where will God be absent? In His face
> Is light, but in His shadow healing too:
> Let Guido touch the shadow and be healed!"

Pompilia's insight grows and deepens, so that at last she trusts in it more than in any merely external authority. She is a devout Catholic, and to her mind an Archbishop "stands for God." When she had gone to him and had poured out her troubles as she would to her mother, he gave advice and she received it humbly, but she learns through her experience that he was mistaken, and cries:

> "But I did wrong and he gave wrong advice
> Though he were thrice Archbishop — that I know."

She divines that the instinct of her heart is wiser than any official authority. It would be foolish to say that this young and ignorant girl revolted against ecclesiastical authority. She could never have dreamed of such a thing. She had only learned that there were some things she knew for herself better than any one in the world. In these she was taught of God.

Pompilia shows that she had the gift which enables one to divine the natures of men, so that she trusted rightly even against all appearances. The comfits at the theatre seemed to have been thrown by Caponsacchi, but Pompilia knew better.

> "Ere I could reason out why, I felt sure,
> Whoever flung them, his was not the hand."

A web of lies is woven about him. She hears letters read, purporting to come from him, which must have made him odious to the soul of a pure woman. But in spite of them she feels sure that he is true and will render her true service. She knew him "by the crystalline soul." Her experience has taught her to see through shams. The way in which the Governor threatened her foster parents with punishment for theft, though they had only received from her what they had given her, and the indifference with which he had heard her com-

plaints, taught her how little impartial justice there may be in the administration of affairs. To her it became clear that the forms of justice were often mere travesties of the vision of ideal right, that is revealed to the "pure in heart."

Nothing is more beautiful in the character of Pompilia than her conviction of the dignity and responsibility of motherhood. It was that which prompted her flight from the home of her husband. While she had no one to care for but herself, she was resigned to suffering and death. After all, what did it matter? Deserted by her parents, hated by her husband, persecuted by those about her, her appeal for comfort and help disregarded by church and state, a lonely girl in a strange city, it could make no difference how soon or in what way the end came. That was her only way out of trouble into peace at the last. But when the sense of a life "more than her own" dawned upon her she saw a new duty and loyally responded to it. She called for aid and determined to flee. She accepted the obligation "to defend that trust of trusts, Life from the Ever Living."

This sense of motherhood revealed to her something of the way in which God cares for his children. God will care for the little one whom

she is leaving better even than her mother-heart could wish.

> "He shall have in orphanage
> His own way all the clearlier: if my babe
> Outlived the hour — and he has lived two weeks —
> It is through God who knows I am not by."

So all the significance of the Christmas time, and the mystery of the incarnation grew clear to the mother-heart. Now she felt what she had always believed. She discerned in her own life what the theologians reason about, and often, by their reasonings obscure. She and Mary were alike mothers.

> "I never realized God's birth before —
> How He grew likest God in being born.
> This time I felt like Mary, had my babe
> Lying a little on my breast like hers."

Such is the character revealed in the story of this ignorant Italian girl of "only seventeen." She had in her own way learned the deepest wisdom of life. The source of all her thought and action was love for others. She saw the evil of the men and women about her, but she saw more clearly the good in the evil. The hardest experiences of hatred, indifference, and neglect only imbued her with tender pity and a spirit of forgiveness. By her fidelity to each duty of life, as child, wife, and mother, she ac-

quired that insight which pierced to the core of things and infallibly distinguished between the true and the false, the real and the apparent. Through her brief experience of motherhood she realized the sweetest and noblest ideals of the Christian faith.

CHAPTER IX

DOMINUS HYACINTHUS DE ARCHANGELIS

HERETOFORE we have listened to the voices of those who have spoken out of their prejudices, their love or hate, their hope or fear. They have all been animated by personal interest or feeling. But in the speeches of the lawyers only a professional interest in the story appears.

Hyacinthus de Archangelis, who has been appointed to defend Guido and his four companions, intends to base his defence on certain abstract principles of law and honor. He knows that he cannot evade the charge of murder or, as he prefers to phrase it, of the "killing." Unfortunately Guido had been unable to endure the torture and had made confession of his deed. Otherwise he could have proved the murder a "mere myth." He could have urged that Guido at the time of its commission was

> "visiting his proper church
> The duty of us all at Christmas-time;
> When Caponsacchi, the seducer, stung
> To madness by his relegation, cast
> About him and contrived a remedy
> In murder: since opprobrium broke afresh,

By birth o' the babe, on him the imputed sire,
He it was quietly sought to smother up
His shame and theirs together, — killed the three,
And fled — (go seek him where you please to search) —
Just at the time when Guido, touched by grace,
Devotions ended, hastened to the spot,
Meaning to pardon his convicted wife,
'Neither do I condemn thee, go in peace!' —
And thus arrived i' the nick of time to catch
The charge o' the killing, though great-heartedly
He came but to forgive and bring to life.
Doubt ye the force of Christmas on the soul?
'Is thine eye evil because mine is good?' "

But now that Count Guido, not being able to bear pain, has confessed his deed, this plea would not answer, and he must find other means to extenuate or perhaps justify it. He contends, therefore, that he finds excuse on the ground that Guido's honor had been threatened, and that in defence of that alone he had killed Pompilia and those with her.

"Therefore we shall demonstrate first of all
That Honour is a gift of God to man
Precious beyond compare: which natural sense
Of human rectitude and purity, —
Which white, man's soul is born with, — brooks no touch:
Therefore, the sensitivest spot of all,
Wounded by any wafture breathed from black,
Is, — honour within honour, like the eye
Centred i' the ball, — the honour of our wife.
Touch us o' the pupil of our honour, then,
Not actually, — since so you slay outright, —
But by a gesture simulating touch,

> Presumable mere menace of such taint, —
> This were our warrant for eruptive ire
> 'To whose dominion I impose no end.' "

Having laid down the abstract principle, de Archangelis proceeds to illustrate its truth. He quotes a passage from Theodoric, refers to the "chaste bees," and tells an interesting story of an elephant which had rebuked the dishonor done to his master by trampling the guilty wife and her paramour to death. Then mounting from beast to man, he cites the Athenian code, and Roman laws of different periods, such as those of Romulus, Julian, Cornelius, and Gracchus, and endeavors to show how, even before the "perfect revelation" had been made, these had proclaimed the right of the injured husband to avenge his threatened honor by the shedding of blood. Grace emphasized what nature had revealed.

> "All that was long ago declared as law
> By the natural revelation, stands confirmed
> By Apostle and Evangelist and Saint, —
> To-wit — that Honour is man's supreme good."

To the proof and elucidation of this he brings forward passages from St. Jerome, St. Gregory, St. Bernard, and Solomon. He finds in Samson an antetype of Guido, who he says bore all evils, "gyves, stripes and daily labor at the mill," but

drew the temple down and killed his foes when his sense of honor was stirred by being brought out as an object of sport.

Even in the words of our Lord Himself he claims to find a proof of the justice of his plea and a reason for the acquittal of Guido, because he said "my honour I give to no man." If a man must defend his honor, and the old law that punished the adulterous wife with stoning has been abolished, primitive revenge must take its place. It is now a man's duty to use his natural privilege. And this, not only nature but the social sentiment demands. It is not a cause which must wait the decision of a court. It demands prompt and immediate action. Courts were not intended to punish such offences or to determine in such matters the measure of innocence or guilt; the husband must defend his own honor. But if this be so, why does the court find it necessary to condemn Guido at all? Simply because it was improperly done. "A good thing done unhandsomely turns ill." In proof of this de Archangelis cites of "Sicily's Decisions sixty-first."

Then the learned lawyer seeks to explain why Guido killed three instead of one, and refers to cases in ancient history, which, whether they justify Guido or not, show that his lawyer was

a man of great erudition. Now the question presses: why did Guido procrastinate his revenge? Why did he do in cold blood that which he failed to do when his blood was hot? To argue in this way, de Archangelis claims, shows ignorance of the way in which honor bears a wound: this, time makes it harder to bear. "Longer the sufferance, stronger grows the pain." Murder ought to be avenged at once, but this is more like the punishment of a theft which one can inflict whenever or wherever he finds the thing stolen in the hands of the thief. But Guido had waited a week after he had arrived in Rome on his mission of revenge, it may be urged. To this de Archangelis replies with an outburst of apparently religious indignation:

> "Is no religion left?
> No care for aught held holy by the Church?
> What, would you have us skip and miss those Feasts
> O' the Natal Time, must we go prosecute
> Secular business on a sacred day?"

Six aggravations of the crime, urged by the prosecution, are all adroitly explained away, and treated as of no consequence, because no crime being committed, there can be no aggravation of it.

> "Fisc,
> How often must I round thee in the ears —
> All means are lawful to a lawful end?

> Concede he had the right to kill his wife:
> The Count indulged in a travesty; why?
> *De illa ut vindictam sumeret,*
> That on her he might lawful vengeance take,
> *Commodius* with more ease, *et tutius,*
> And safelier."

De Archangelis then justifies Guido for hiring others to help him commit "the killing." They could not understand reasons of honor. We must, he contends, "translate our motives like our speech into the lower phrase that suits the sense of the limitedly apprehensive."

With this he ends the defence of Guido and denotes a few contemptuous, plausible passages to the defence of his hirelings. It is true, he says, that they afterwards intended to kill Guido for merely neglecting to pay them. But that again showed his cultivated mind. He would not desecrate the deed, nor vulgarize justice by defraying its cost "by money dug out of the dirty earth."

> "What though he lured base hinds by lucre's hope, —
> The only motive they could masticate,
> Milk for babes, not strong meat which men require?
> The deed done, those coarse hands were soiled enough,
> He spared them the pollution of the pay."

The lawyers in *The Ring and the Book* add nothing to our knowledge of the tragedy which they have been called upon to consider. Their

whole endeavor is to make speeches which will produce an effect upon the judges and which, above all, will add to their own reputation for learning and special pleading. There is not a trace of insight in all they say. Their formulas of law obscure their vision of reality. But little as they tell us of the facts of the case, they tell us much of themselves. In and through their pleadings, and in and through the processes of their minds as they prepare them, we learn what manner of men they are. They unconsciously reveal the secrets of their own hearts.

We see de Archangelis in his study, preparing his argument in defence of Guido. We hear him speak and we know at once that he is a fond father, and that love for his boy and desire for his welfare are motives that animate his efforts. Evidently he has very little interest in his case, and his mind works upon it mechanically. But the thought of what he may do for his boy frees him for a time from the seductions of sluggishness and appetite. This speech will help his boy in his future career, and for that he will work with all the might that is in him.

> "We 'll beat you, my Bottinius, all for love;
> All for our tribute to Cinotto's day."

The supper he is to give on this his son's birthday will, he hopes, win the favor of the grand-

father, and he plans how he may gain bequests for the boy from the other relatives. He is a man of domestic temper who loves the enjoyments of home, and these have power to console him for the loss of the office which Bottinius, his rival, had gained.

"Well
Let others climb the heights o' the court, the camp!
How vain are chambering and wantonness,
Revel and rout and pleasures that make mad!
Commend me to home-joy, the family board,
Altar and hearth! These, with a brisk career,
A source of honest profit and good fame,
Just so much work as keeps the brain from rust,
Just so much play as lets the heart expand,
Honouring God and serving man, — I say,
These are reality, and all else, — fluff.
Nutshell and naught, — thank Flaccus for the phrase!
Suppose I had been Fisc, yet bachelor!"

He is very fond of a good meal, and the expectation of the birthday feast in the evening again and again interrupts the construction of his plea. Supper and argument, indignation and questions of cookery, mingle in surprising and delightful confusion. He is seeking to mitigate one of the aggravations of his client's offence and here is the course his mind takes:

"Yes, here the eruptive wrath with full effect!
How, did not indignation chain my tongue,
Could I repel this last, worst charge of all!

(There is a porcupine to barbecue;
Gigia can jug a rabbit well enough,
With sour-sweet sauce, and pine-pips; but, good Lord,
Suppose the devil instigate the wench
To stew, not roast him? Stew my porcupine?
If she does, I know where his quills shall stick!
Come, I must go myself and see to things:
I cannot stay much longer stewing here.)
Our stomach . . . I mean, our soul is stirred within,
And we want words."

It is easy enough to see that to Hyacinthus de Archangelis the soul is a rhetorical phrase, while the stomach is a substantial fact. It is evident too that he is shrewd; his eye is always wide open to any chance. The Pope may remember the speech he is making which will help him to decide the case of Guido, and Rome is full of people now to edify, and to give one name and fame. Hyacinthus has sympathy; his own discomfort reminds him of the discomfort of others. As he writes his fingers grow cold, and so he thinks:

"Guido must be all goose-flesh in his hole,
Despite the prison-straw: bad carnival
For captives! no sliced fry for him, poor Count!"

I am not aware that he is peculiar in this, for after all most of us are sympathetic only when we happen to think of it. His view of providence is somewhat like his sympathy. The

horror of the case does not impress him. Providence has allowed the murder to take place just to help him on. Here he is anxious to succeed and to give his boy a good start in life.

> "Now how good God is! How falls plumb to point
> This murder, gives me Guido to defend
> Now, of all days i' the year, just when the boy
> Verges on Virgil. . . .
> The fact is, there 's a blessing on the hearth,
> A special providence for fatherhood!"

In this he is neither better nor worse than those who imagine that the universe was constructed for their special advantage — and that whatever happens is good because it enables them to make a few more dollars or win a higher place in some social set.

It is plain that de Archangelis has only a professional interest in Guido. He is far more sorry later that he loses his case than that Guido should lose his head, and he tries to make up the disappointment to his boy by getting him the pleasure of witnessing the execution. Intellectually he impresses us as a man of prosaic mind, one who worked slowly, and who beat out his speeches by patient toil. He is not carried along by a train of consecutive thought, and chance words very often suggest the cause of his reasoning. He mentions a flea and then says:

"Talking of which flea,
Reminds me I must put in special word
For the poor humble following, — the four friends,
Sicarii, our assassins caught and caged."

On the whole Hyacinthus reveals himself to us as a dull man inclined to be lazy, whom the love of his home spurred into activity. He is fond of good dinners, and his sympathies and views are somewhat contracted. He has his little spites and prejudices, but on the whole he means well, and in this particular case does the best he can for a sorry client.

CHAPTER X

JURIS DOCTOR JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

When we turn from the speech for the defence to that of the prosecution, we find the same line of subtle, ingenious argumentation running through it. It is based upon an abstract principle which is twisted now this way, and now that. It suits the purpose of Bottinius, when he is preparing the speech he intends to deliver in court, to speak in high praise of Pompilia:

"A great theme: may my strength be adequate!
For — paint Pompilia, dares my feebleness?
How did I unaware engage so much
—Find myself undertaking to produce
A faultless nature in a flawless form?
What 's here? Oh, turn aside nor dare the blaze
Of such a crown, such constellation, say,
As jewels here thy front, Humanity!
First, infancy, pellucid as a pearl;
Then childhood — stone which, dew-drop at the first,
(An old conjecture) sucks, by dint of gaze,
Blue from the sky and turns to sapphire so:
Yet both these gems eclipsed by, last and best,
Womanliness and wifehood opaline,
Its milk-white pallor, — chastity — suffused
With here and there a tint and hint of flame, —

Desire, — the lapidary loves to find.
Such jewels bind conspicuously thy brow,
Pompilia, infant, child, maid, woman, wife —
Crown the ideal in our earth at last!
What should a faculty like mine do here?
Close eyes, or else, the rashlier hurry hand!"

He describes Pompilia's life from her birth to her marriage, and he contends that Guido did not forbear, as he might have done, with the frolicsome girl who had become his wife; that he pressed his right as a husband too far. It was very unwise, "if Pompilian plaint wrought but to aggravate Guidonian ire." He thinks he ought to have borne with her all the more because the parents, who were the source of all his troubles, had left his home. He had no cause to make the daily life of Pompilia intolerable by his jealousy. But he is unreasonable.

"Enough! Prepare,
Such lunes announced, for downright lunacy!
Insanit homo, threat succeeds to threat,
And blow redoubles blow, — his wife, the block.
But, if a block, shall not she jar the hand
That buffets her? The injurious idle stone
Rebounds and hits the head of him who flung.
Causeless rage breeds, i' the wife now, rageful cause,
Tyranny wakes rebellion from its sleep.
Rebellion, say I? — rather, self-defence,
Laudable wish to live and see good days,
Pricks our Pompilia now to fly the fool
By any means, at any price, — nay, more,

Nay, most of all, i' the very interest
O' the fool that, baffled of his blind desire
At any price, were truliest victor so.
Shall he effect his crime and lose his soul?
No, dictates duty to a loving wife;
Far better that the unconsummate blow,
Adroitly baulked by her, should back again,
Correctively admonish his own pate!"

To achieve a good end, all efficacious means are allowable. Now, urges Bottinius, beauty was all that Pompilia had; therefore to use it was praiseworthy. If she needed some one to serve her, what better could she offer to secure him than her love? "Because, permit the end— permit therewith, means to the end!" All the rest of his speech is a variation upon this theme. By ingenious use of it every suspicious circumstance is allowed to be fact, and then justified. He cites the example of Ulysses and Venus to excuse Pompilia's approaches to Caponsacchi and her deceitful wiles. What does it matter, if she does hold nocturnal meetings with him?

"Does every hazel-sheath disclose a nut?
He were a Molinist who dared maintain
That midnight meetings in a screened alcove
Must argue folly in a matron."

To say so would be to cast a slur on Judith. All these things, it is true, have been proved false; there were no visits to Pompilia's house by Capon-

sacchi, and there were no "nocturnal meetings," but, for the sake of his argument he allows them to stand as true.

Pompilia is charged with taking money for the expenses of her journey, but "permit the end, permit the means to the end." He will allow the truth of the coachman's evidence that "the journey was one long embrace." What of that? Admit the end, and you admit the means.

> "Say, she kissed him, say, he kissed her again!
> Such osculation was a potent means,
> A very efficacious help, no doubt:
> Such with a third part of her nectar did
> Venus imbue: why should Pompilia fling
> The poet's declaration in his teeth? —
> Pause to employ what — since it had success,
> And kept the priest her servant to the end —
> We must presume of energy enough,
> No whit superfluous, so permissible?"

Bottinius justifies Pompilia's lie, as he allows it to be called, about her inability to write, as a praiseworthy attempt to repair a wrong hastily done, and construes her assertion that she had never learned to write as an act of bravery; and he cries, "O splendidly mendacious!" But his opponent will urge that the means used were vile. Not so, since no other means were at hand. Governor and Archbishop had failed her in her hour of need; every one waited for a miracle to

save her, while Caponsacchi acted. In illustration of this he cites an incident from the Jewish "Sepher Toldoth Yeschu":

"It happened once, — begins this foolish Jew,
Pretending to write Christian history, —
That three, held greatest, best, and worst of men,
Peter and John and Judas, spent a day
In toil and travel through the country-side
On some sufficient business — I suspect,
Suppression of some Molinism i' the bud.
Foot-sore and hungry, dropping with fatigue,
They reached by nightfall a poor lonely grange,
Hostel or inn; so, knocked and entered there.
'Your pleasure, great ones?' — 'Shelter, rest and food!'
For shelter, there was one bare room above;
For rest therein, three beds of bundled straw:
For food, one wretched starveling fowl, no more —
Meat for one mouth, but mockery for three.
'You have my utmost.' How should supper serve?
Peter broke silence: 'To the spit with fowl!
And while 't is cooking, sleep! since beds there be,
And, so far, satisfaction of a want.
Sleep we an hour, awake at supper-time,
Then each of us narrate the dream he had,
And he whose dream shall prove the happiest, point
The clearliest out the dreamer as ordained
Beyond his fellows to receive the fowl,
Him let our shares be cheerful tribute to,
His the entire meal, may it do him good!'
Who could dispute so plain a consequence?
So said, so done; each hurried to his straw,
Slept his hour's-sleep and dreamed his dream, and woke.
'I,' commenced John, 'dreamed that I gained the prize
We all aspire to: the proud place was mine,
Throughout the earth and to the end of time

I was the Loved Disciple: mine the meal!'
'But I,' proceeded Peter, 'dreamed, a word
Gave me the headship of our company.
Made me the Vicar and Vice-gerent, gave
The keys of heaven and hell into my hand,
And o'er the earth, dominion: mine the meal.'
'While I,' submitted in soft under-tone
The Iscariot — sense of his unworthiness
Turning each eye up to the inmost white —
With long-drawn sigh, yet letting both lips smack,
'I have had just the pitifullest dream
That ever proved man meanest of his mates,
And born foot-washer and foot-wiper, nay
Foot-kisser to each comrade of you all!
I dreamed I dreamed; and in that mimic dream
(Impalpable to dream as dream to fact)
Methought I meanly chose to sleep no wink
But wait until I heard my brethren snore;
Then stole from couch, slipped noiseless o'er the planks,
Slid downstairs, furtively approached the hearth,
Found the fowl duly brown, both back and breast,
Hissing in harmony with the cricket's chirp,
Grilled to a point; said no grace but fell to,
Nor finished till the skeleton lay bare.
In penitence for which ignoble dream,
Lo, I renounce my portion cheerfully!
Fie on the flesh — be mine the ethereal gust,
And yours the sublunary sustenance!
See that whate'er be left ye give the poor!'
Down the two scuttled, one on other's heel,
Stung by a fell surmise; and found, alack,
A goodly savour, both the drumstick bones,
And that which henceforth took the appropriate name
O' the Merry-thought, in memory of the fact
That to keep wide awake is man's best dream.

. . . . . .

Let others shriek
'Oh what refined expedients did we dream
Proved us the only fit to help the fair!'
He cried, 'A carriage waits, jump in with me.'"

Bottinius continues: Guido might have been content with the decision of the court which really gave him what he ought to have most desired, the justification of his wife. After this vindication of her spotlessness he should have been ready to welcome her back to his home, and by so doing prevent the possible visits of Caponsacchi to the home of her parents where she was still residing.

The birth of a son should have inclined his heart to peace with the mother and have led him to welcome the little one who might be near the heart of both his parents. Instead of producing that effect, it vexes him all the more.

"The perverse Guido doubts his eyes,
Distrusts assurance, lets the devil drive."

But to the last Pompilia "used the right means to the permissible end, and by a full confession saved her soul." It then occurs to Bottinius that if this confession is true it really leaves him "nothing to excuse, reason away, or show his skill about." This result he seeks to evade by a resort to technical devices. The confession, he acknowledges, is not to be believed: still

Pompilia was justifiable in using her dying words to make it easier for the priest Caponsacchi. If that plea will not do, then he will maintain that Pompilia confessed before she talked and so "the sacrament obliterates the sin" of falsehood. After another legal quibble, Bottinius closes his argument in a way that indicates his perfect satisfaction with it.

"Thus,
Law's son, have I bestowed my filial help,
And thus I end, *tenax proposito;*
Point to point as I purposed have I drawn
Pompilia, and implied as terribly
Guido: so, gazing, let the world crown Law —
Able once more, despite my impotence,
And helped by the acumen of the Court,
To eliminate, display, make triumph truth!
What other prize than truth were worth the pains?

"There 's my oration — much exceeds in length
That famed panegyric of Isocrates,
They say it took him fifteen years to pen.
But all those ancients could say anything!
He put in just what rushed into his head:
While I shall have to prune and pare and print.
This comes of being born in modern times
With priests for auditory. Still, it pays."

Bottinius does not discover himself to us in so good a light as his opponent. In mental ability he is, no doubt, far superior to de Archangelis. He has great oratorical powers, and nobody

knows it better than he. He does not like the custom of presenting pleas in writing.

"Had I God's leave, how I would alter things!
If I might read instead of print my speech, —
Ay, and enliven speech with many a flower
Refuses obstinate to blow in print,
As wildings planted in a prim parterre, —
This scurvy room were turned an immense hall;
Opposite, fifty judges in a row;
This side and that of me, for audience — Rome:
And, where yon window is, the Pope should hide —
Watch, curtained, but peep visibly enough.
A buzz of expectation! Through the crowd,
Jingling his chain and stumping with his staff,
Up comes an usher, louts him low. 'The Court
Requires the allocution of the Fisc!'
I rise, I bend, I look about me, pause
O'er the hushed multitude: I count — One, two —"

He has some poetic feeling and a command of glittering phrases which to some may appear to have something substantial in them. He takes great pleasure in his work and has no doubt of its excellence. When he has finished his speech, he is satisfied that it is a masterpiece, something far more difficult to achieve than any that classic orators have handed down; it pays, and he is content. He cares more for his speech and his own ingenuity than he cares for his client.

In reading the argument of Archangelis for Guido we feel that he said about all he could say

for him. He employed all the technicalities of pleading because he could do no more. But Bottinius has a client whose confession makes her a martyr and saint. He has no proof that she is not all that she appears to be, and yet he is so possessed with the desire to display his ingenuity that he sets Pompilia's confession aside and defends her as if everything urged against her were true. He has no faith in human nature. He does not know purity and innocence when he sees them. Such a man may do well in defence of a scoundrel, because he can understand him, but innocence puzzles and annoys him. To deceive such a man one needs only to tell him the truth. His defence of Pompilia is a judgment on his moral obtuseness and a revelation of the inherent nastiness of his nature. For Pompilia to be acquitted on the grounds which he presents would have been to give her legal justification at the expense of moral condemnation.

CHAPTER XI

THE POPE

We have heard the voices of those who are interested in the story of *The Ring and the Book*, of those who took part in it, and of the lawyers who pleaded for and against Guido as they happened to be professionally engaged. We now are to hear one speak whose attitude toward all the incidents of the story is that of the impartial spectator. The Pope, to whom appeal has been made to rescue Guido, because, having taken some minor orders he is entitled to benefit of clergy, is made, by the genius of the poet, to unfold the workings of his mind as he ponders the case of which he is to be the final judge. His meditation consists of three distinct parts. In the first part the Pope discloses his method of preparing for a decision on important matters. Like Ahasuerus he turns to the chronicles of the past for instruction and guidance. He reads in one of them an account of Formosus, who was made Pope in 891, and of his trial and condemnation after death by his successor Stephen VI, and he

follows also the successive decisions for or against him, until John IX in the year 898, "Exact eight hundred years ago to-day" pronounced in his favor.

"So worked the predecessor: now my turn!
In God's name! . . . Once more appeal is made
From man's assize to mine: I sit and see
Another poor weak trembling human wretch
Pushed by his fellows, who pretend the right,
Up to the gulf which, where I gaze, begins
From this world to the next, — gives way and way,
Just on the edge over the awful dark:
With nothing to arrest him but my feet."

"Guido," he says, "catches at me with convulsive force" and cries for "leave to live the natural minute more." To this his enemies reply: "Leave? None!" "Put him to death." "Punish him now." He, "the solitary judge," must either save the wretch or let him "drift to the fall." He dallies with the thought "as if reprieve were possible for both prisoner and Pope," but he knows this is a mere delusion:

"The case is over, judgment at an end,
And all things done now and irrevocable:
A mere dead man is Franceschini here,
Even as Formosus centuries ago."

All the evidence, the Pope tells us, has been read and weighed, and the essential facts evolved; and he simply pauses before he acts.

"Irresolute? Not I, more than the mound
With the pine-trees on it yonder!"

Nor does his sense of fallibility deter him, for he says: "Call ignorance my sorrow, not my sin!" If in some after-time, some one, by deeper probing into the mass of facts, should find Guido innocent, he declares, "I shall face Guido's ghost nor blanch a jot." God, he knows, has given him "so much, no more" of reasoning faculty — and he is responsible only for the best possible use of it. Indeed, he feels more guilty for discharging a chaplain, for no cause save that he snuffled when he said mass, than he will if he should make a mistake as to Guido's guilt. For God judges not the result of our acts, but the motives which prompted them.

"Therefore I stand on my integrity,
Nor fear at all."

But, as the day closes, he knows that "two names now snap and flash from mouth to mouth," Guido's and his own. Which of the two will live the longer? He might "dip in Virgil," or, better still, consult the "sagacious Swede who finds by figures how the chances prove," to answer the question. Take the latter: tell him the condition of the two men. Here is Guido, doomed to death, it is true, but who, like hundreds of others, may escape. He is full of strength, noble, backed by nobler friends; and the community is in

sympathy with him. Such an one may bribe the jailor, or break jail, or be rescued by his friends.

The other man, himself, is eighty-six years old, one who bears all the world's "cark and care." A straw swallowed in his posset or a stool over which he might stumble may end his life at any moment. Which of the two will live the longer? Does the Swede say that Guido will? Then he is wrong; "to-day is Guido's last, my term is yet to run." But suppose the Swede were right? Then how shall he, the Pope, answer for this last act of his before the Judge of all? He will not answer that question in words, for words hide more truth than they show; nor will he answer as Pope. He will answer as Antonio Pignatelli,

> "Thou, not Pope, but the mere old man o' the world,
> Supposed inquisitive and dispassionate,
> Wilt thou, the one whose speech I somewhat trust,
> Question the after-me, this self now Pope,
> Hear his procedure, criticize his work?"

The second part contains the judgment which, as ~~Antonio Pignatelli,~~ he passes upon all the characters in the poem, and first upon Guido. The Pope recalls the conditions of his life, and declares that he has "a sound frame," and a "solid intellect." He has had, indeed, to struggle with the temptations incidental to the lot of one

"who born with an appetite lacks food," but these need not have proved so much a stumbling block as a stepping stone. To help him he had a traditionary name, choice companionship, and "conversancy with the faith." But he has used the church to aid his selfish purpose. He is a "religious parasite," and accepts sacred duties to avoid the consequences of his iniquity. The honorable name he bears does not enlarge his nature; he grows more unworthy of it. He seeks not to live up to it, but to live by it. Test him by his last act, the marriage, and in it can be seen that

> "Not one permissible impulse moves the man,
> From the mere liking of the eye and ear,
> To the true longing of the heart that loves,
> No trace of these: but all to instigate,
> Is what sinks man past level of the brute
> Whose appetite if brutish is a truth.
> All is the lust for money."

He then reviews his course of conduct towards the Comparini and Pompilia — and shows how he tried to drive his wife to ruin, and how, when that failed, he devised the letters

> "— false beyond all forgery —
> Not just handwriting and mere authorship,
> But false to body and soul they figure forth —
> As though the man had cut out shape and shape
> From fancies of that other Aretine,
> To paste below — incorporate the filth
> With cherub faces on a missal-page!"

Caponsacchi's intervention saved him from crime, and the courts, by their decision, did the same service for him. The way was now open for him to escape from his past "though as by fire." But, the Pope says, Guido refused to learn his lesson. The birth of his son taught him only a new way to get money. All that he could see was "the gold in his curls," and that if Pietro and Violante and Pompilia were out of the way the money would belong to the child, and the child would be in his keeping. Knowing this he called four peasant laborers, and, with them, went to Rome to commit the profitable crime. Everything seemed to conspire to favor his purpose, and he might have escaped from Roman territory and laughed in Arezzo at its officials if he had not forgotten to secure the permit, to be had for the asking, to hire a conveyance.

Perhaps, the Pope thinks, he cursed his omission, and yet it was the mercy stroke that stopped the fate; for his companions had planned to murder him because he had not paid them, and would have done so, had they not been arrested before they could carry out their purpose.

The Pope then depicts some of the minor characters of the poem. Of the Abate Paolo, the older brother of Guido, he says:

"This fox-faced horrible priest, this brother-brute
. . . who trims the midnight lamp
And turns the classic page — and all for craft,
All to work harm with, yet incur no scratch."

He refers to Girolamo, the younger brother, as one in whom he discerns "a new distinctive touch," "nor wolf, nor fox, but hybrid." Words seem too feeble to describe the mother of Guido:

"Unmotherly mother and unwomanly
Woman, that near turns motherhood to shame,
Womanliness to loathing:"

and he calls the four companions, "These God-abandoned wretched lumps of life." Then we have the Pope's opinion of the Governor and of the Archbishop. With the former he can do nothing, but of the Archbishop he says significantly, "With thee at least anon the little word!"

The Pope's impression of Pompilia follows in one of the noblest and most beautiful passages of the whole poem.

"First of the first,
Such I pronounce Pompilia, then as now
Perfect in whiteness: stoop thou down, my child,
Give one good moment to the poor old Pope
Heart-sick at having all his world to blame —
Let me look at thee in the flesh as erst,
Let me enjoy the old clean linen garb,
Not the new splendid vesture! Armed and crowned,
Would Michael, yonder, be, nor crowned nor armed,
The less pre-eminent angel? Everywhere

I see in the world the intellect of man,
That sword, the energy his subtle spear,
The knowledge which defends him like a shield —
Everywhere; but they make not up, I think,
The marvel of a soul like thine, earth's flower
She holds up to the softened gaze of God!
It was not given Pompilia to know much,
Speak much, to write a book, to move mankind,
Be memorized by who records my time.
Yet if in purity and patience, if
In faith held fast despite the plucking fiend,
Safe like the signet stone with the new name
That saints are known by, — if in right returned
For wrong, most pardon for worst injury,
If there be any virtue, any praise, —
Then will this woman-child have proved — who knows? —
Just the one prize vouchsafed unworthy me,
Seven years a gardener of the untoward ground
I till, — this earth, my sweat and blood manure
All the long day that barrenly grows dusk:
At least one blossom makes me proud at eve
Born 'mid the briers of my enclosure! Still
(Oh, here as elsewhere, nothingness of man!)
Those be the plants, imbedded yonder South
To mellow in the morning, those made fat
By the master's eye, that yield such timid leaf,
Uncertain bud, as product of his pains!
While — see how this mere chance-sown, cleft-nursed seed
That sprang up by the wayside 'neath the foot
Of the enemy, this breaks all into blaze,
Spreads itself, one wide glory of desire
To incorporate the whole great sun it loves
From the inch-height whence it looks and longs! My flower,

My rose, I gather for the breast of God,
This I praise most in thee, where all I praise,
That having been obedient to the end
According to the light allotted, law
Prescribed thy life, still tried, still standing test, —
Dutiful to the foolish parents first,
Submissive next to the bad husband, — nay,
Tolerant of those meaner miserable
That did his hests, eked out the dole of pain, —
Thou, patient thus, could'st rise from law to law,
The old to the new, promoted at one cry
O' the trump of God to the new service, not
To longer bear, but henceforth fight, be found
Sublime in new impatience with the foe!
Endure man and obey God: plant firm foot
On neck of man, tread man into the hell
Meet for him, and obey God all the more!
. . . Go past me
And get thy praise — and be not far to seek
Presently when I follow if I may!"

Next to Pompilia the Pope approves Caponsacchi. He calls him "my warrior priest," and "Irregular noble 'scapegrace — son the same!" Perhaps the church had been "faulty" in attempting to subject such a nature as his to its service. All the qualities he had shown were not given him by the church, but belonged to him already. He finds much that was "blameworthy" in Caponsacchi, in "this youth prolonged though age was ripe." But he prefers to dwell upon "the healthy rage, — when the first moan broke from the martyr-maid." There may, he thinks,

have been much rashness shown, but he thanks God for the outcome.

"Ay, such championship
Of God at first blush, such prompt cheery thud
Of glove on ground that answers ringingly
The challenge of the false knight, — watch we long
And wait we vainly for its gallant like
From those appointed to the service."

He believes that throughout all his warfare he was pure, and that the greatness of his temptation had served to reveal in him what was worthy of praise. He had done the duty which those who were trained for it failed to do because they were somehow

"too obtuse
Of ear, through iteration of command,
For catching quick the sense of the real cry, —
Thou, whose sword-hand was used to strike the lute,
Whose sentry-station graced some wanton's gate,
Thou didst push forward and show mettle, shame
The laggards, and retrieve the day. Well done!
Be glad thou hast let light into the world
Through that irregular breach o' the boundary, — see
The same upon thy path and march assured,
Learning anew the use of soldiership,
Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear,
Loyalty to the life's end! Ruminate,
Deserve the initiatory spasm, — once more
Work, be unhappy, but bear life, my son!"

Last of all the Pope refers to the Comparini, as "starved samples of humanity," "Foul and

fair sadly mixed natures," and so they suffer, "Life's business being just the terrible choice."

We might well suppose now that all was over and done with; not so our Pope. He is only beginning. He asks the question, Upon what do these judgments of mine rest? What light have I, from the upper sky, to guide me? The meditation upon this forms the third part of "The Pope" and extends from line 1284 to line 1954.

He believes that he himself reflects something of the light of God — that his "poor spark had for its source the sun." He has in the Christian revelation a tale of God which his heart loves and his reason approves. It satisfies the demand of his nature for love in God, as nothing else does or can. There may, indeed, be errors in the transmission of the Gospel story, but these do not concern him; the same truth may be revealed under various forms. Nor does the experience of Pompilia, who suffers in her innocence, and who, by what seems an accident, barely escapes moral condemnation, disturb his faith. This life is short, and the future may serve to right the wrong. Nor, again, does it seriously trouble him that some reject Christianity. Life is probation, and there could be no test of our natures if we were arbitrarily compelled to believe, — if there were no possibility of doubt.

What really troubles him is that men who accept the truth do so little with it. This Aretine archbishop to whom Pompilia cried, "Protect me from the fiend," would not do so because he feared Guido, and he threw her back to him as a "bone to mumble."

"Have we misjudged here, over-armed our knight,
Given gold and silk where plain hard steel serves best,
Enfeebled whom we sought to fortify,
Made an archbishop and undone a saint?"

The monk is one whose prayers and fastings may be supposed to have rendered him superior to the fear of the world. To him Pompilia came with her story of sorrow, but at the thought of doing anything displeasing to those above him, he shuddered to the marrow, and ended by saying, "I break my promise: let her break her heart."

And here is "The Monastery called of Convertites, meant to help women because these helped Christ." They had cared for Pompilia and had borne witness

"To her pure life and saintly dying days.
She dies, and lo, who seemed so poor, proves rich.
What does the body that lives through helpfulness
To women for Christ's sake? The kiss turns bite,
The dove's note changes to the crow's cry: judge!
'Seeing that this our Convent claims of right
What goods belong to those we succour, be
The same proved women of dishonest life, —
And seeing that this Trial made appear

Pompilia was in such predicament, —
The Convent hereupon pretends to said
Succession of Pompilia, issues writ,
And takes possession by the Fisc's advice.'
Such is their attestation to the cause
Of Christ, who had one saint at least, they hoped:
But, is a title-deed to filch, a corpse
To slander, and an infant-heir to cheat?
Christ must give up his gains then! They unsay
All the fine speeches, — who was saint is whore.

. . . . . .

Can it be this is end and outcome, all
I take with me to show as stewardship's fruit,
The best yield of the latest time, this year
The seventeen-hundredth, since God died for man?
Is such effect proportionate to cause? "

And the terror increases, he says, when he sees that men do as well on natural as they do on supernatural reasons. Caponsacchi responds to the call of oppressed innocence. But "where are the Christians in their panoply?" "Slunk into corners." At this, there will be a protest from those who claim that they have "left their martyr-mark" everywhere. True, but they have worked no greater deeds than others have

"Done at an instinct of the natural man.
Immolate body, sacrifice soul too, —
Do not these publicans the same? "

There is zeal and earnestness, but they are about things far off, like the excitement about the proper term for Deity in Chinese. But

"Where is the gloriously-decisive change,
Metamorphosis the immeasurable
Of human clay to divine gold, we looked
Should, in some poor sort, justify its price?"

If a member of the order of the Rosicrucians could make no more gold by his mystical processes than the vulgar got by the old smelting process

"Would not we start? . . .
If this were sad to see in just the sage
Who should profess so much, perform no more,
What is it when suspected in that Power
Who undertook to make and made the world,
Devised and did effect man, body and soul,
Ordained salvation for them both, and yet . . .
Well, is the thing we see, salvation?"

But he himself has faith and even his doubts have their value. The weakness in a faith may be the source of its strength. So he concludes, "I have light nor fear the dark at all." Euripides might claim that he

"When the Third Poet's tread surprised the Two, —
Whose lot fell in a land where life was great
And sense went free and beauty lay profuse,
I, untouched by one adverse circumstance,
Adopted virtue as my rule of life,
Waived all reward, loved but for loving's sake,
And, what my heart taught me, I taught the world,
And have been teaching now two thousand years."

Why, Euripides might ask, should he be blamed, when he attained so long ago to what men fail

now to see even in the full blaze of the Christian revelation? How shall he answer Euripides? May it not be that our truth has become so true, so much a part of the order of the world, that it no longer requires purity of soul to perceive it, a heroic courage to maintain it? Faith may have become so easy that the most ordinary motives lead men to adopt it. This old faith may need to be broken up in order to resolve itself into a new and living faith. May not the coming age

> "Correct the portrait by the living face,
> Man's God by God's God in the mind of man?"

But such an age must be one of trial and terror. Many will sink in the ocean of doubt. Some like Pompilia will do what is right and true just the same; they will distinguish the right by "foot-feel." Others will say, "Follow your heart as I did mine." This was the way of Caponsacchi, and it was well, for his heart was right. But the Abate, and those like him, may say "my heart beats to another tune," and live for greed, ambition, lust, revenge.

The Pope now imagines that he hears the remonstrances made in Guido's favor, made not in the name of mercy, but of what is called honor. They urge that he need give no reason for a decision in his behalf except that even minor orders

n the church secure one from punishment. He may claim to acquit Guido in the interest of the church, or he may say that culture, the spirit of civilization, demands his pardon. Does he wish, they urge, to end his days condemning a man to death? Will he have it said as soon as he is dead,

> "scarce the three little taps
> O' the silver mallet ended on thy brow, —
> 'His last act was to sacrifice a Count
> And thereby screen a scandal of the church'" ?

He hears the voices that demand judgment, and cry: "Pronounce then, for our breath and patience fail." To these the Pope replies: —

> "I will, Sirs: but a voice other than yours
> Quickens my spirit. '*Quis pro Domino?*
> Who is upon the Lord's side?' asked the Count.
> I, who write —
> 'On receipt of this command,
> Acquaint Count Guido and his fellows four
> They die to-morrow: could it be to-night,
> The better, but the work to do, takes time.
> Set with all diligence a scaffold up,
> Not in the customary place, by Bridge
> Saint Angelo, where die the common sort;
> But since the man is noble, and his peers
> By predilection haunt the People's Square,
> There let him be beheaded in the midst,
> And his companions hanged on either side:
> So shall the quality see, fear and learn.
> All which work takes time: till to-morrow, then,
> Let there be prayer incessant for the five!'
> For the main criminal I have no hope

Except in such a suddenness of fate.
I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
I could have scarce conjectured there was earth
Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all:
But the night's black was burst through by a blaze —
Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,
Through her whole length of mountain visible:
There lay the city thick and plain with spires,
And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.
So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.
Else I avert my face, nor follow him
Into that sad obscure sequestered state
Where God unmakes but to remake the soul
He else made first in vain; which must not be.
Enough, for I may die this very night:
And how should I dare die, this man let live? "

The Pope is called upon to accept or reject the plea of Guido, that because he was in orders he was entitled to exemption from the penalty imposed by the court. It is in his power to set Guido free or to send him to the scaffold. The decision of such a case which actually required only the consideration of a few minutes, occupied hours in the poem.

The Pope is an old man of eighty-six, whose life the slightest circumstance might terminate. He wishes to judge this case as if it were his last, and as if his whole life were to be estimated in the light of it. His reading of history has taught him how the estimates of men change from

generation to generation: one blames, another praises, the same act. How will men regard this last judgment of his? It is not enough for him that he is the head of the church: he will not fall back upon any official excuse for his decision. Antonio Pignatelli, "the mere old man o' the world, supposed inquisitive and dispassionate," must judge what is done by the Pope. He has looked into this case, has pored over all the documents and pleadings of the lawyers, and has arrived at a conclusion.

Still he ponders and again brings before his mind the persons involved in the murder case. He praises and blames in a way that shows that long experience of life has taught him to read the heart of man, and the reader feels that he has said the last word in the matter. He goes beyond this, and seeks to test the reality of the moral and spiritual ideas on which his decision rests.

In and through his long meditation he impresses us as a man of profound conscientiousness, whose opinions were always based upon first-hand knowledge and the deepest reflection. He also reveals himself as a man capable of moral indignation. We feel it throbbing through his review of the career and character of Guido, and of his mother and brothers. In it all there is clearly perceptible a hatred of shams, and

cruelty, and greed. He has no patience with the Convertite nuns who seek to gain money by the vilification of Pompilia who had been entrusted to their care, and we know it will go hard with the Archbishop when he speaks to him "anon the little word."

But along with his hatred of the wrong go his perception and approval of the good. His whole nature is stirred by the character of Pompilia. He sees in her a revelation of the highest form of humanity. He knows a beautiful soul when he sees it. It might have been expected that he would condemn Caponsacchi, but while he discerns the technical offence of the priest, he still more clearly perceives the real character and motive of the man. To him the impulse of helpfulness was much more important than the violation of priestly etiquette, and the sacrifice of reputation in defence of a woman in peril was worth more than the formal correctness of those who had neglected her appeals. The public and even the judges of the court who tried Caponsacchi did not believe his direct and simple statement. To them it was only a story cleverly told on his own behalf. But the Pope recognizes its genuineness and says

> "In thought, word and deed,
> How throughout all thy warfare thou wast pure,
> I find it easy to believe."

The Pope has what is rarer than conscientiousness, or moral indignation, or perception of reality; he has spiritual courage. Many men have doubts and questionings about the deepest faiths of their souls, but few have the courage to face them resolutely as does the Pope. Usually they turn their thoughts away from the facts that disturb the repose of their minds and hearts. They are afraid to examine the foundations on which their faith rests. They turn aside from the fact that many acknowledge Christianity and yet act as if they had never heard of it. Still less are they ready to ask themselves why many who never heard of Christianity shame its adherents by their conduct and character. They never venture to ask why it is that the deeds prompted by natural instinct are as great and noble as those inspired by Christian faith.

These are just the questions which the Pope faces. He will not hide them from sight. He meets them not as a doubter but as a man whose faith is deeper and stronger than his questionings; he is a man of faith because he has the courage to doubt. His courage goes beyond this. It is clear to him that the old faith is now so easily accepted that it exerts little influence on the practical life. Perhaps, as a result of this, it may be well to break up the long established and

customary order of thought and belief. He shudders at the thought because he sees that many would do worse than they do now, if the usual standards should be removed. Some, like Pompilia, might know the right way by "the foot-feel," and others might follow the guidance of their higher nature, like Caponsacchi, but how about those who trust to what is lower in themselves and follow it, like Guido and his brothers? Yet in spite of all his forebodings he has the courage to believe that even the dissolution of the old order would result at last in the establishment of one that would better serve the higher interests of humanity. There is not in all literature and history a nobler example of spiritual courage than this.

Then our Pope is independent of all external influences. The suggestion that he may be mistaken in his judgment of Guido, and that later knowledge may show him as really innocent, does not deter him. He knows his integrity and stands securely upon that. Ignorance is his sorrow, not his sin. He knows that he has done his best and has acted upon a worthy motive; and for him that is enough. Nothing offends him more than the intimation that people will criticize his action. This only serves to precipitate his final decision. When the friends of Guido

are represented as addressing him, and appealing to him on the ground that after he is gone it will be said that

> "His last act was to sacrifice a Count,
> And thereby screen a scandal of the Church";

when they urge him to pronounce his decision because their "breath and patience fail," he does so in a way altogether different from what they had anticipated.

> "I will, Sirs, but a voice other than yours
> Quickens my spirit. '*Quis pro Domino?*
> Who is upon the Lord's side?' asked the Count.
> I who write —
> 'On receipt of this command
> Acquaint Count Guido and his fellows four,
> They die to-morrow; could it be to-night,
> The better, but the work to do takes time.'"

CHAPTER XII

GUIDO

We have, once before, heard Guido speaking in his own defence before the court, and using all his skill and craft to save his life. Now we hear him, after the trial is over, and after the Pope has refused to revoke the sentence against him. He is in his prison cell where his old time friends, Cardinal Acciaiuoli and Abate Panciatichi, have come to notify him of his impending doom, and to hear his confession. In their presence he pours out, without much order or premeditation, all the thoughts and feelings that possess him. He recalls the place where the castle of the Cardinal's ancestor was situated, and then breaks forth into an appeal for help, urging that his blood comes from as far a source. Perhaps, after all, their coming is simply a trick on their part to test his courage, but, he declares, he is calm as he hears them, knowing that he is innocent. All honest Rome had "approved his part." His lawyers had assured him that on account of his "priestly tonsure" he could depend upon

the intervention of the Pope, "so meek and mild and merciful." But the Pope had refused the chance to save him: he is old himself, tired of life, and so is glad to have him die.

Again Guido turns to his friends, and cries: "Sir Abate, can you do nothing?" Things have changed so much since the days of his grandfather, who stabbed the man who merely threw a gibe at him as he passed by, and was never called to account for it. Now he does the same thing and "death is the penalty." The Abate and Cardinal must hear him talk, others will hear them at "pleasant supper time." Then he exclaims:

> "Life!
> How I could spill this overplus of mine
> Among those hoar-haired, shrunk-shanked odds and ends
> Of body and soul old age is chewing dry!
> Those windlestraws that stare while purblind death
> Mows here, mows there, makes hay of juicy me,
> And misses just the bunch of withered weed,
> Would frighten hell and streak its smoke with flame!
> How the life I could shed yet never shrink,
> Would drench their stalks with sap like grass in May!
> Is it not terrible, I entreat you, Sirs? —
> With manifold and plenitudinous life,
> Prompt at death's menace to give blow for threat,
> Answer his 'Be thou not!' by 'Thus I am!' —
> Terrible so to be alive yet die?"

Now, he continues, he sees things clearly. His folly consisted in thinking he needed a wife,

when, what he seemed to lack was already within himself. But while he talks he allows himself to wander to the contemplation of the Mannaia which he had seen, in all its ghastliness "many a good year gone," just after it had decapitated a man who had struck a nobleman for taking away his sister.

The Pope will not be merciful, as he ought; and so they now want his confession. Why do they want it? Well, because they wish to prevent people from imputing bad motives to the Pope. They want him to "end the edifying way," but he will end telling the truth. He is a wolf, and of course the shepherds must hate him, but that is no reason why the wolf should "lick the prong that spits him." Why should he repent? To do so will not save him from death. He is about to die, and so he will out with the truth and ask no respite. He has opposed himself to the regular order of things; he has fenced with the law, and law has thrust him through, and made an end of him. But they want him to acknowledge that virtue alone disarmed and slew him. Law does not suffice. They seek a word from him which shall "somehow put the keystone in its place and crown the arch." To this Guido says, "Then take the word you want." Long ago it was agreed that a man must not

commit extra-legal acts because they pleased himself, — and that whosoever did must pay the forfeit. He has broken this compact and loses his head.

"But, repentance too?
But pure and simple sorrow for law's breach
Rather than blunderer's-ineptitude?
Cardinal, no! Abate, scarcely thus!
'T is the fault, not that I dared try a fall
With Law and straightway am found undermost,
But that I failed to see, above man's law,
God's precept you, the Christians, recognize?
Colly my cow! Don't fidget, Cardinal!
Abate, cross your breast and count your beads
And exorcize the devil, for here he stands
And stiffens in the bristly nape of neck,
Daring you drive him hence!"

If ever there was such a thing as Christian faith it has vanished long ago. It is no longer a reality in the world. Once, perhaps, it affected conduct, but it does so no more. Everybody does as he would do if he believed just the reverse of what Christianity teaches.

"Why should things change because men disbelieve
What 's incompatible, in the whited tomb,
With bones and rottenness one inch below?
What saintly act is done in Rome to-day
But might be prompted by the devil, — 'is'
I say not, — 'has been, and again may be,' —
I do say, full i' the face o' the crucifix
You try to stop my mouth with!"

As for his friends what had they taught him? They told him to get pleasure, but they never warned him of the consequences of pursuing it. No word of warning ever fell from their lips. Instead of that, they as good as told him to wear the sheep's wool over the wolf's skin. But now when the wolf has shown his teeth too much, they join with those who seek his destruction. If he were only free once more they would get "a growl for their beckoning."

Why do people call his defence "plausible but false," when plausibility is the only reason they can give "in favor of the best belief they hold!" He had told his story of the flight of his wife with the priest, and how they took their pleasure in the two days' flight, and people call it incredible. But why? The story might seem credible to the husband, at least. Men are often blamed for not perceiving the misconduct of their wives; why should he be blamed for suspecting wrong when in fact there was none?

Presently, however, Guido asks:

> "What shall I say to God?
> This, if I find the tongue and keep the mind —
> 'Do Thou wipe out the being of me, and smear
> This soul from off Thy white of things, I blot!
> I am one huge and sheer mistake, — whose fault?
> Not mine at least, who did not make myself!' "

He declares that he is unable to repent one particle of the past, and longs for "some cold wise man" who might go into the depths of his being, see how he came to commit this blunder, which others call a crime, and pronounce on his desert with reason. He was at the turning of the roads; where did he take the first false step?

He remembers Pompilia who seems to stand before him now as she stood for the first time with

> "The amazed look, all one insuppressive prayer, —
> Might she but breathe, set free as heretofore,
> Have this cup leave her lips unblistered, bear
> Any cross anywhither anyhow,
> So but alone, so but apart from me!
> You are touched? So am I, quite otherwise,
> If 't is with pity. I resent my wrong,
> Being a man."

He was old, and the whole attitude of Pompilia showed her aversion to him. Her mother tried to persuade him that by taking a little pains with himself he might appear even better to her than a boy. But that deceived only for a moment, the man who saw that her neck writhed, corded itself against his kiss, and that her hand was rigid with despair when he clasped it. All this he resented because he was young in soul. So, he claims, Pompilia began by wronging him, and he hated her. At the marriage she came, knelt,

rose, spoke, and was silent, just as she was bid, and this also he resented. She did all and submitted to his will simply because her mother bade her. There might have been some compensation in revolt, but there was none in this "predetermined saintship." People, he says, told him that he must teach the child to love — to endure — him. He must be contented, they said, with friendship, even as young lovers are, when they have kissed themselves cold. But he did not wish "to miss the daisied mile the course begins with." His wife was really no wife, but "a nullity in female shape," who was soon to become a "pungent plague," when associated with the aged couple — Pietro and Violante. He does not see what these two had to complain of him. They had meant to fool him, and he had fooled them. Instead of taking their punishment quietly, they kept up

> "A perfect goose-yard cackle of complaint
> Because I do not gild the geese their oats."

He turned them out, and was just beginning to enjoy "the sweet sudden silence all about" when he found

> "My dowry was derision, my gain — muck,
> My wife, (the Church declared my flesh and blood)
> The nameless bastard of a common whore:
> My old name turned henceforth to . . . shall I say
> 'He that received the ordure in his face.' "

Guido reminds the Abate of his punishment of a man who had written an abusive poem about himself, and asks how he can think he has taken undue revenge upon the parents of Pompilia who had

> "Circled me, buzzed me deaf and stung me blind,
> And stunk me dead with fetor in the face
> Until I stopped the nuisance."

But they may urge that Pompilia was innocent, and if so, he had no reason for murdering her. It is true she did just as he bade her:

> "She sits up, she lies down, she comes and goes.
> Kneels at the couch-side, overleans the sill
> O' the window, cold and pale and mute as stone,
> Strong as stone also."

She annoyed him all the more that she made no resistance to his wishes and desires. There must be some reason for it all:

> "Is there no third party to the pact? . . .
> Who is the friend i' the background that notes all?
> Who may come presently and close accounts?
> This self-possession to the uttermost,
> How does it differ in aught, save degree,
> From the terrible patience of God?"

But his friends will say to him: all this only means she did not love you. What of that? The servants do not love him, but no less they render what he desires. The horse admonished by the

whip fullfils the will of his master. If a woman can "feel no love, let her show the more." Why, the soprano who sang last week in Rome for "two gold zecchines the evening," made love in such a way that ladies swooned, although "the poor bloodless creature never felt":

> "Here 's my slave
> Whose body and soul depend upon my nod
> Can't falter out the first note in the scale
> For her life! Why blame me if I take the life?"

But there is no necessity for defending his deed: it is enough for him to say that he chose to hate her. Others have their likes and dislikes, why not he? True, he might have turned the marriage to better account. It is easy to say that now, but he has taken the wrong step which is to end with the scaffold. Give him another chance, and he will do better. These religious guides had all his life taught him to suppress himself, which really meant denial of himself to pleasure them. Now he had avenged an outrage committed on himself in a way that they blamed, but they ought to blame themselves. His wife proved a stumbling block in his way. He had resorted to law, but to no purpose. Then he had acted for himself in the spirit of the law. If things had gone at the inn, as he had expected,

and if he had surprised the runaways asleep and pinned them through, even they would have agreed that it was a just judgment upon the guilty ones. But somehow matters did not turn out so; what might have been a success turned out a failure. His act, which might have been gravely, grandly right, now proved to be grossly wrong. So it was in his last act at the villa. As he marched towards it with his four companions he thought everything had been so far successful, and wondered where he should find the failure. Only two of the three might be within, or perhaps some visitor, outlingering others, might make an outcry. But all three were within and no one else.

But he found the three alone, as he hoped, and his failure came in his forgetfulness to secure the permit beforehand which would have given him the right to hire a conveyance to carry him away from the city. What was more, the only man in Rome who could not be bribed was the one to whom he applied. Otherwise he could have snapped his fingers at the Roman courts and found refuge in Tuscany, where the laws "understand civilized life and do its champions right." All that might have been was "baulked by just a scrupulous knave." When he was brought back to Rome, he found his wife, rid-

dled with wounds, still living to confront him, and by her death-bed story to turn his "plausibility to nothingness."

> "When destiny intends you cards like these;
> What good of skill and preconcerted play?"

If she had been dead, Guido thinks he could have claimed that he had come to Rome to see his child, and fearing danger, had taken four companions for protection, but had come unexpectedly to the villa to find Pompilia "in the embrace of the priest." These two, backed by Pietro and Violante, had sprung upon him, he would have said, and in defence of his life he was compelled to slay them all, except the priest, who had escaped.

> "What 's disputable, refutable here? —
> Save by just this one ghost-thing half on earth,
> Half out of it, — as if she held God's hand
> While she leant back and looked her last at me,
> Forgiving me (here monks begin to weep)
> Oh, from her very soul, commending mine
> To heavenly mercies which are infinite, —
> While fixing fast my head beneath your knife!
> 'T is fate not fortune."

He learns that his four companions were "cherishing a scheme" to cut his throat for their own benefit, and he rejoices that he is to be executed last and so will be able to behold

them all "dangling high on either hand like scare-crows in a hempfield."

Guido then comes back to his trial, in which his lawyers tried every device in vain. Everything had been against him. The appeal to the Pope was useless. Law had condemned him while the Pope merely bade him, "Confess and be absolved." Well, they may tell "his Holiness, that he has acquired new strength from his despair." He will give "earth spectacle of a brave fighter who succumbs to odds that turn defeat to victory." He will end his life, and Rome will approve him as much as if he had died on the field of battle fighting against the Turks. There is no reason why he should live longer. The popular sympathy would fail him the moment he became free. His friends would not care to be seen in his company. At his home, in Arezzo, the coming years would be "sad and sapless." The priests would leer at him; his friends would look askance. The populace would be in love with the "poor young good beauteous murdered wife." His brothers would remind him of his past mistake whenever he became angry or attempted to give them advice; even his mother would groan confirmation of his failure. Besides, he is fifty years old and there are no new openings before him. He might

renew his youth in his son, but he would have to wait twenty years for him to share life with him; and then the son is apt to crowd his father to one side. Even if he were obedient and all that, one can hire service just as good. The four young fellows, he says

> "did my hest as unreluctantly,
> At promise of a dollar, as a son
> Adjured by mumping memories of the past!"

Then, why should he wish to live when all the means of life are lacking? And now that he is about to die, he will speak out the truth. He never was a Christian; he is a "primitive religionist." He has obeyed the specific commands of Christianity, but in everything outside of these he has reverted to his own natural impulses. He intimates that his companions are of the same way of thinking. No one, he says to the Abate, "teaches you what Venus means." We "give alms prescribed on Friday," but there is no explicit word in the book which debars revenge because the foe is prostrate. The old faith of the primitive religionist, obedience to impulse, can exist under the new forms; all that is needed is to "sin o' the sly." He claims that he has followed the logic of his position:

> "I, like the rest, wrote 'poison' on my bread,
> But broke and ate: — said 'Those that use the sword
> Shall perish by the same;' then stabbed my foe."

What his friends ought to say to him, if they had the wit, is, that he had merely pursued the wrong method, so that while loving life as much as he did, they were compelled to punish him. He should, first of all, have put forth the religious motive at Rome, and claimed that he meant to prevent his child from being reared as a Molinist. True, Pietro and Violante were not Molinists but he had only made the mistake of "stamping on wheat," when he meant to "trample tares." Now the mistake can be atoned for only by death, which, indeed, may be a new beginning. He proposes when he begins anew to carry out his wolfish nature, to

> "Wallow in what is now a wolfishness
> Coerced too much by the humanity
> That 's half of me as well! Grow out of man,
> Glut the wolf-nature."

Through all obstacles he wishes his real instinct to reveal itself, as fire at the top of some mountain. His wife was of an altogether different nature, and for that reason, was hateful to him.

> "Ay, of the water was that wife of mine —
> Be it for good, be it for ill, no run
> O' the red thread through that insignificance!
> Again, how she is at me with those eyes!
> Away with the empty stare! Be holy still,
> And stupid ever! Occupy your patch
> Of private snow that 's somewhere in what world

May now be growing icy round your head,
And aguish at your foot-print, — freeze not me,
Dare follow not another step I take,
Not with so much as those detested eyes,
No, though they follow but to pray me pause
On the incline, earth's edge that 's next to hell!
None of your abnegation of revenge!
Fly at me frank, tug while I tear again!
There 's God, go tell Him, testify your worst!
Not she! There was no touch in her of hate:
And it would prove her hell, if I reached mine!
To know I suffered, would still sadden her,
Do what the angels might to make amends!"

Guido knows it will be said that others would have loved her for her saintliness, and that he did not know the value of a woman like Pompilia. What had seemed to him a daub was a Rafael. To this, he replies that she was too pale and spectral for him. He could have borne with her, if she had come to him "rainbowed about with riches." He is not ashamed to allow that he prizes "sordid muck" as the best gift. He wants a woman who will work out his will, one like Lucrezia Borgia; and again he repels the religious ministrations of his friends.

"Cardinal, take away your crucifix!
Abate, leave my lips alone, — they bite!
Vainly you try to change what should not change,
And shall not. I have bared, you bathe my heart —
It grows the stonier for your saving dew!
You steep the substance, you would lubricate,
In waters that but touch to petrify!"

He tells his friends that they too are "petrifactions of a kind." He has unfolded his story, and they move not a muscle, show no mercy, ready to "slay impenitence" without waiting for contrition. The Cardinal knows he is wronged. No one made inquisition for the Cardinal's blood when he made his way through "lives trodden into dust," into the College; he is not even troubled by the memory of it. So he treads out the lives of happy innocent things, as he moves to dinner, and kills the damsel-fly that flaps his face. Why, then, because he himself has taken his own course, must the Pope kill him? He insinuates to the Cardinal that, in the election of a Pope, which must occur soon, he can be of great service in getting rivals out of the way. He adjures his friend to go to the Pope and urge his pardon, because he is innocent, or even if "murder-crusted," his death would insult the emperor and outrage the French king. He must remind the Pope too that Guido "has friends who will avenge him," and ask him if he would "send a soul straight to perdition, dying frank an Atheist?" In one breath, Guido urges the Cardinal, for God's sake to say this, and in another he abandons all hope that he will do so. If he cannot persuade them to do as he wishes, he will not make a con-

fession; "take your crucifix away, I tell you twice."

There follows a silence so prolonged while the priests are praying, that it seems to terrify Guido, and he breaks forth again to assert the essential wolfishness of his nature, that loves to know even at the last that it is inflicting some pang. When the knock comes, he assures them, he will not cling to his bench nor flee the "hangman's face." After all, what is the worth of life? The Pope is dead, the Abate will not live more than a year with that "hacking cough" of his, the Cardinal can never become Pope. All about him are moving on toward death: what can it matter that he arrives a minute sooner than the others? As for the manner of it, he counts it gain that his death will be harsh and quick.

The whole man, at his best and worst, comes out in the closing lines.

"You never know what life means till you die:
Even throughout life, 't is death that makes life live,
Gives it whatever the significance.
For see, on your own ground and argument,
Suppose life had no death to fear, how find
A possibility of nobleness
In man, prevented daring any more?
What 's love, what 's faith, without a worst to dread?
Lack-lustre jewelry, but faith and love
With death behind them bidding do or die —

Put such a foil at back, the sparkle 's born!
From out myself how the strange colours come!
Is there a new rule in another world?
Be sure I shall resign myself: as here
I recognized no law I could not see,
There, what I see, I shall acknowledge too:
On earth I never took the Pope for God,
In heaven I shall scarce take God for the Pope.
Unmanned, remanned: I hold it probable —
With something changeless at the heart of me
To know me by, some nucleus that 's myself:
Accretions did it wrong? Away with them —
You soon shall see the use of fire!

Till when,
All that was, is; and must forever be.
Nor is it in me to unhate my hates, —
I use up my last strength to strike once more
Old Pietro in the wine-house-gossip-face,
To trample underfoot the whine and wile
Of beast Violante, — and I grow one gorge
To loathingly reject Pompilia's pale
Poison my hasty hunger took for food.
A strong tree wants no wreaths about its trunk,
No cloying cups, no sickly sweet of scent,
But sustenance at root, a bucketful.
How else lived that Athenian who died so,
Drinking hot bull's blood, fit for men like me?
I lived and died a man, and take man's chance,
Honest and bold: right will be done to such.

Who are these you have let descend my stair?
Ha, their accursed psalm! Lights at the sill!
Is it 'Open' they dare bid you? Treachery!
Sirs, have I spoken one word all this while
Out of the world of words I had to say?

Not one word! All was folly — I laughed and mocked!
Sirs, my first true word, all truth and no lie,
Is — save me notwithstanding! Life is all!
I was just stark mad, — let the madman live
Pressed by as many chains as you please pile!
Don't open! Hold me from them! I am yours,
I am the Grandduke's — no, I am the Pope's!
Abate, — Cardinal, — Christ, — Maria, — God, . . .
Pompilia, will you let them murder me?"

Count Guido Franceschini expressed himself before his judges as he wished to be understood; but in his second review of the story we have the real man, who discloses his motives and desires. Here we are allowed to see him, as He who reads the secrets of men's hearts sees him. He is no longer mindful of the social and religious conventions. What he utters expresses his real nature. It is not the "Count" but the man who speaks now. No concealment is needed and he attempts none. He lets us see the evil of his soul unmixed with any thought of good. Mr. Hyde is now left without the influence of Dr. Jekyll.

To rightly appreciate this, we must bear in mind that it is the utterance of a man excited, maddened, overwhelmed, who does not plan what he says, but who allows his mind to wander at will. His speech is the expression of pure passion, as the Pope's is the expression of pure

reason. In it we discover how much pretence there was in the defence. One of the reasons which he had given for wishing to live was his mother's need of him. He cried in a way that impressed us.

> "Let her come, break her heart upon my breast,
> Not on the blank stone of my nameless tomb."

But in this last utterance he has no word to say about her except that she will give "confirmatory groan, for unsuccess, explain it how you will." We may justify this by reference to the excitement of the moment; but love does not so easily forget. We cannot help feeling that Guido remembered his mother only when he thought he could produce a pathetic impression by it.

Again, he said in his defence of himself, that, when he came to the cottage on the night of the murder, he might have abandoned his purpose if Pompilia had appeared in the doorway; and he spoke of her as "the tender thing," "the lamb that lay in my bosom," as "once pure and good." But here all these terms of endearment are missing. Now he speaks of her as a "nullity in female shape," "vapid disgust soon to be pungent plague," "this pale poison my hasty hunger took for food." In his defence he wished to live for the sake of his son Gaetano. He said, "Let me

lift up his youth and innocence to purify my palace"; but now he assures his friends that a son will be more of a hindrance than a help, that after all he can hire a man for a dollar a day to do what a son would do, "adjured by mumping memories of the past." In his defence he posed as a friend of law, and order, and society, but in his cell he suggests to the Cardinal how he may be useful to him in the impending election of a Pope by putting some of his dangerous rivals out of the way. Of course, it may be urged that in the frenzy of fear and passion he forgot himself. But it is more likely that he remembered himself too well. When it was useful to him to be a friend of law and order, he was ready to be one; when it was useful to him to commit an act of violence, he was prepared to do that. His personal interest was his only law.

Guido's attitude toward religion was equally pretentious. In his defence he used the most formal statement of faith and spoke: "In the name of the indivisible Trinity." In his last hours he declares himself to be a "primitive religionist" — one who believes in obeying the natural promptings of the human heart, and in the right of the stronger. He obeyed what Christianity specially commands, but otherwise felt free to do as he could and as he pleased.

> "Give alms prescribed on Friday: — but, hold hand
> Because your foe lies prostrate, — where 's the word
> Explicit in the book debars revenge? "

He is ready to profess himself an "atheist" if by so doing he can escape execution.

We learned from the defence something of the way in which he considered his wife, as one who had no right to expect love, whose supreme duty was obedience to her husband. But now he bares the secret motives of all his actions. He was angry with Pompilia, because she was not all that he expected of a wife. He was willing to accept beauty and purity of soul, if he could have also either wealth or an efficiency which could aid his selfish purposes. The fact is, he declares, that his wife was too good; a Lucretia Borgia or an Olimpia or Circe would have suited him better. Nothing in the conduct of Pompilia satisfied him. Did she obey him, desire his love when he asked it, come and go, lift her eyes, or cast them down at his bidding? In all this he could only see the "stone strength of white despair." She struggled against him no more and he suspected there was "some third party to the pact." Was he reminded that all this meant she did not love him? He replied that love was not needed. He has so little sense of sincerity of soul that he believed sham love would do just

as well. The sufferings of Pompilia wakened no compassion in Guido; they only annoyed him. He resented her evident repugnance to himself and it simply vexed him that he was viewed with repulsion. Selfishness could not have been more supreme.

Guido not only resented the sufferings of Pompilia, when he ought to have been moved to console and alleviate them, but he is sorry now because she, pierced with two and twenty wounds, persists in living, and so makes it impossible for him to present a defence of himself at the expense of her honor. No matter what becomes of her soul, if only he can escape punishment! It never dawns upon him that he is proposing a mean thing; he is too mean to see how mean he is. He complains of the misfortune which made his intention impossible.

> "Well,
> The worst 's in store: thus hindered, haled this way
> To Rome again by hangdogs, whom find I
> Here, still to fight with, but my pale frail wife?
> — Riddled with wounds by one not like to waste
> The blows he dealt, — knowing anatomy."

Guido refuses to show any repentance for his deed. He admits he has committed a blunder, and he is ready to pay the penalty, but he has no perception of sin or the need of repentance for it.

Guido's idea of religion is a merely formal one. According to him it is based upon a faith which has long ago ceased to be. Nobody, he claims, thinks of acting in accordance with it. The world goes on and looks the same with the profession of these forms as it would if everybody believed something different. Real acceptance of religion would make a change in a moment. It is interesting to notice how near Guido comes to the thought of the Pope. He also sees that men accept the Christian faith, and act no better than those who do not, sometimes not as well. The difference lies in the use which each one makes of this perception. With the Pope it is a reason for making religion more real and vital; with Guido it serves as an excuse for a heartless conformity to the religion of the land.

Guido feels that he is no worse than those about him. All seek their pleasure, not the will of God, and he has done only the same. He declares that they advised him to act the wolf's part and he resents their willingness to take part against the wolf, when he acts after the manner of a wolf. He claims that he acted upon the principles of those whom he was taught to follow. He reminds the Abate of the punishment he had inflicted upon one who had ridiculed him in a poem. He himself has done only the same to

those who offended him. His purpose was no worse than that of others who pretend to deprecate his crime. To Guido law was not an expression of eternal right; it was but a formal convention which was good if it favored him, bad if it opposed him. Whatever the code allowed him to do, that it seemed to him right to do.

Guido's excuses for himself are significant. He will, in the first place, say to God, "I am one huge and sheer mistake!" Who shall say he is not right? Surely one who was well organized could not pursue the ends which he pursued in the way he did. The Pope pointed out the places where he might have done otherwise than he did, but who knows that, constituted as he was, he could have done so? If he was a mistake he was therefore necessitated by his structure always to take the wrong course. He seems repulsive to us in his self-revelation, and we can well believe him, when he says he has a "wolfish nature." Guido bases his plea of forgiveness on this fact. But the trouble with this plea is that it is too limited in its application. He does not make this principle of forgiveness universal. It never dawns upon him that Pompilia was a "pungent plague," because, in relation to him, she was a mistake. The "whine and wile" of Violante annoyed him and also the stupid ways

of Pietro. But if he had been true to his principle, he would have borne with them in patience because, like himself, they were mistakes, and therefore deserved not resentment but the large tolerance which he desired for himself. That he did not accord to others what he expected for himself may be taken as a proof of what a great mistake he really was.

Again Guido says, "I did not make myself." Pompilia makes the same plea for him. That fact saved Guido from a great responsibility. He had nothing to do with the conditions under which he was born. But he had something to do with the way in which he used those conditions. The Pope thinks that Guido might have profited by the straitened circumstances of his lot, and made the stumbling block a stepping stone. He might have treated Pompilia with kindness instead of cruelty. The birth of his son might have stirred his heart with affection instead of prompting him to see only the "gold in his curls," and so to the murder of his wife and her parents. Still Guido might plead that, being the man he was, he must have dealt with the conditions as he did. No abstract reasoning can refute this plea, while no practical mind can accept it.

While Guido has no moral perception and no sense of responsibility, he is very bitter against

those who in any way oppose or annoy him. Personal irritation supplies the lack of moral indignation. His spiteful and revengeful feeling reveals itself again and again. When he learns that his four companions had planned to kill him if they had escaped arrest, he rejoices in the thought that he will see them hanged before his own "head falls." He declares that his stabs went deeper because he fancied he might find "a friend's face at the bottom of each wound and scratch its smirk a little." He recalls the movements of Violante as "tempting the sudden fist of man too much." He is glad because his friend the Abate must die soon of his cough — and because the Cardinal can never be Pope. It angers him because the Pope who is so old and weak is likely to live longer than himself. Hatred of everything but himself has gained full possession of him. He comforts himself with the assurance that all others must die as well as himself.

Nor has Guido the redeeming quality of courage. Many men who have done nothing else well have died well. He shrinks with horror from death; when it is imminent and the Brothers of Death come to take him to the scaffold, he is utterly unmanned. He shrieks out a mad appeal to every possible power of help to deliver

him. He even calls upon the woman whom he had wronged and murdered. Bishop Westcott, whose essay on "Browning's View of Life" is one of the noblest which even this great scholar and thinker has written, says that in this cry of Guido to Pompilia, he shows that he has known what love was and knowing it has begun to feel it. Who can decide what was in that last cry? It may have been a selfish appeal for help to one who because of her goodness might save him, or it may have been the expression of Guido's real thought of Pompilia. But whether he now saw in her a manifestation of love in which he wished to share, or a power which might deliver him from impending death, no one can say. We can only "trust the larger hope."

CHAPTER XIII

THE BOOK AND THE RING

The Book and the Ring is the fulfilment of the promise of the poet in the first book, that after he has led his readers to the summit from which the wide prospect round may be seen, he will lead them back to mother earth. He has made the voices speak again, as once they spoke while excitement was at its highest, and while all hearts were revealing their inmost thought and motive. Now he ends with the recital of the gossip and chatter of the street.

What we have in *The Book and the Ring* is the commonplace of contemporary life. The story is, practically, at an end, with the death of Guido, the chief actor in it. What had once filled the vision of men and women had fallen and faded from their view.

"What was once seen, grows what is now described,
Then talked of, told about, a tinge the less
In every fresh transmission; till it melts,
Trickles in silent orange or wan grey
Across our memory, dies and leaves all dark,
And presently we find the stars again."

After Feb. 22, 1698, the poet gives four reports "concerning those the day killed or let live."

The first is a letter of a Venetian gentleman then in the city of Rome, from which we learn how the decision of the Pope was viewed by the people of consideration there. The visitor explains that the Pope is tottering on the verge of the grave, and that men are betting on his probable successor. He seemed to be doing very well while he could go out of doors and saunter by the river, but confinement within doors, on account of the rain, caused "fainting fits" which only his determination to hold a Jubilee a second time, enables him to overcome.

Guido, until within two days, had seemed safe: every one in Rome was in his favor. But the prejudices of the Pope, his passion for France, got the better of him. "And he persisted in the butchery." He seemed to be moved by his regard for the mob, and rebuffed Martinez who came to plead for Guido's pardon. More than all this, he ordered the execution to take place where it could be seen by all.

Two old friends of Guido, Acciaiuoli and Panciatichi, had been with him during his last hours, to dispose him for ending well, and had been perfectly successful in their endeavor. Guido appeared in his car, so intrepid and nonchalant

that all had admired him. As the procession moved on a car ran over a man and killed him, "and bitter were the outcries of the mob against the Pope." A beggar, lame from birth, recovered the use of his leg "through prayer of Guido as he glanced that way." At the scaffold, after the hanging of the four peasants, which was hardly noticed, Guido harangued the multitude,

> "begged forgiveness on the part of God
> And fair construction of his act from men,
> Whose suffrage he entreated for his soul,
> Suggesting that we should forthwith repeat
> A *Pater* and an *Ave*, with the hymn
> *Salve Regina Cœli*, for his sake.
> Which said, he turned to the confessor, crossed
> And reconciled himself, with decency,
> . . . — then rose up, as brisk
> Knelt down again, bent head, adapted neck,
> And, with the name of Jesus on his lips,
> Received the fatal blow."

When the headsman showed his head to the populace, strangers were much disappointed because he was not as tall as he had been reported to be, and his face was not one "to please a wife." His friends said his unpleasing appearance was due to his costume: — "He wore the dress he did the murder in."

A second report appears in a letter of Don Giacinto Arcangeli, the advocate who defended Guido, to a fellow advocate at Florence, in which

he informs him that he had almost succeeded in securing a reprieve for Guido. It is to this advocate, Cencini, that we owe the book out of which the ring of poetry was made. In his letter Arcangeli tells his correspondent that his "justificative points" had arrived too late to benefit his client, "now with God." The court had decided, in spite of all his pleas, against him, and as the Pope had judged it expedient to dispense with Guido's plea of privilege, he had been executed, with his four companions. However,

> "He had commiseration and respect
> In his decease from universal Rome,
> . . . . . .
> The nice and cultivated everywhere."

The result, Arcangeli feels, must be due to his inability "to set the valid reasons forth." On the next leaf he bids his friend show to others what he had just written on the other side, but to keep what he now says for himself. Cencini's pleas had come too late, but after all nothing would have availed against the wish of an old man to see one younger than himself die before him. His superb defence of Guido would remain, while ineptitude and obstinacy would go with the Pope to the tomb. Besides, all will understand and stigmatize the motives which led him to change the place of execution.

He must now turn to another case, but before the mail goes, he must say that his boy, godson of Cencini, had enjoyed the sight of the execution. He relates with gusto the reply which his son had made to a lady who twitted him with the remark that his father's eloquence could not be depended upon, as heretofore, for help. He finally comforts himself with the assurance that the Pope thinks that his was the real victory, if learning and eloquence "could avail to gainsay fact."

A letter of Bottinius, the advocate of Pompilia, follows. He has gained his case, and "made truth triumph," but he is dissatisfied. He complains, that as usual, he had "the plain truth to plead." Guido, "like the poltroon he was," had "fully confessed his crime," and there was really the end of the matter. His rival can triumph in the fact that in spite of all difficulties he nearly succeeded in getting his client off free. This he knew Arcangeli and Rome would say.

"I looked that Rome should have the natural gird
At advocate with case that proves itself;
I knew Arcangeli would grin and brag:
But what say you to one impertinence
Might move a stone? That monk, you are to know,
That barefoot Augustinian whose report
O' the dying woman's words did detriment
To my best points it took the freshness from,

— That meddler preached to purpose yesterday
At San Lorenzo as a winding-up
O' the show which proved a treasure to the church.
Out comes his sermon smoking from the press:
Its text, — 'Let God be true, and every man
A liar,' — and its application, this,
The longest-winded of the paragraphs,
I straight unstitch, tear out and treat you with."

In this sermon the "impertinent" monk declared that the case of Pompilia was by no means an illustration of the truth that innocence always prevails. Many, as innocent as she, had not been "plucked from the world's calumny." So it might have been with Pompilia, and so, for a time it was, had not events proved and proclaimed her a pure white soul. Even "law, appointed to defend the just," failed to discern her character, and if allowed, would have caused her to be classed among the vilest of her kind. It was only "the true instinct of an old good man" which had seen and proclaimed what she really was. All this he declares, demonstrates the worthlessness of human fame.

The sermon provokes Bottinius very much, and he exclaims:

"Didst ever touch such ampollosity
As the monk's own bubble, let alone its spite?"

His sermon itself was made for the fame which he professed to flout. As for Pompilia, about

whom the preacher boasted, he will show what law can do for her. The Monastery of the Convertites is entitled to the estate of every sinner who dies in its care. Now Pompilia was in its care and therefore a "sinner"; and although the court declared Guido guilty, it did not pronounce her innocent. Bottinius, as attorney for the monastery, will bring suit against her as a "person of dishonest life," and asks his correspondent to send him the judgment of the court at Arezzo,

> "clenched
> Again by the Granducal signature,
> Wherein Pompilia is convicted, doomed,
> And only destined to escape through flight
> The proper punishment. Send me the piece, —
> I 'll work it! And this foul-mouthed friar shall find
> His Noah's-dove that brought the olive back
> Turn into quite the other sooty scout,
> The raven, Noah first put forth the ark,
> Which never came back, but ate carcasses!
> No adequate machinery in law?
> No power of life and death i' the learned tongue?
> Methinks I am already at my speech,
> Startle the world with 'Thou, Pompilia, thus?
> How is the fine gold of the Temple dim!' "

We are told, however, that Bottinius was disappointed in his expectation. Six months later, the old Pope, who still lived on, again proclaimed "the perfect fame of dead Pompilia," and forbade the Convertite nuns to interfere, in any

way, with her representative in the care of her estate. Next year the Pope died, and the poet adds

"If he thought doubt would do the next age good,
'T is pity he died unapprised what birth
His reign may boast of, be remembered by —
Terrible Pope, too, of a kind, — Voltaire."

This really ends the story. Nothing more can be learned of Gaetano, the son of Guido and Pompilia. All that can be found is a record of a public attestation, which a sister of Guido moved the authorities of Arezzo to give to the right of the Franceschini to men's reverence. This record in "nearly the worst Latin ever writ," declares that

"'Since antique time whereof the memory
Holds the beginning, to this present hour,
The Franceschini ever shone, and shine
Still i' the primary rank, supreme amid
The lustres of Arezzo, proud to own
In this great family, the flag-bearer,
Guide of her steps and guardian against foe, —
As in the first beginning, so to-day!'"

One would like to know whether Gaetano, of such "perfect parentage," "born of love and hate," lived or died, what were his fancies when a man, whether he was like his father or mother. Of all this we know nothing, and the poem ends with these lines:

"Such, then, the final state o' the story. So
Did the Star Wormwood in a blazing fall
Frighten awhile the waters and lie lost.
So did this old woe fade from memory:
Till after, in the fulness of the days,
I needs must find an ember yet unquenched,
And, breathing, blow the spark to flame. It lives,
If precious be the soul of man to man.

So, British Public, who may like me yet,
(Marry and amen!) learn one lesson hence
Of many which whatever lives should teach:
This lesson, that our human speech is naught,
Our human testimony false, our fame
And human estimation words and wind.
Why take the artistic way to prove so much?
Because, it is the glory and good of Art,
That Art remains the one way possible
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least.
How look a brother in the face and say
'Thy right is wrong, eyes hast thou yet art blind,
Thine ears are stuffed and stopped, despite their length
And, oh, the foolishness thou countest faith!'
Say this as silverly as tongue can troll —
The anger of the man may be endured,
The shrug, the disappointed eyes of him
Are not so bad to bear — but here 's the plague
That all this trouble comes of telling truth,
Which truth, by when it reaches him, looks false,
Seems to be just the thing it would supplant,
Nor recognizable by whom it left:
While falsehood would have done the work of truth.
But Art, — wherein man nowise speaks to men,
Only to mankind, — Art may tell a truth
Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,
Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word.

So may you paint your picture, twice show truth,
Beyond mere imagery on the wall, —
So, note by note, bring music from your mind,
Deeper than ever e'en Beethoven dived, —
So write a book shall mean beyond the facts,
Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.

And save the soul! If this intent save mine, —
If the rough ore be rounded to a ring,
Render all duty which good ring should do,
And, failing grace, succeed in guardianship, —
Might mine but lie outside thine, Lyric Love,
Thy rare gold ring of verse (the poet praised)
Linking our England to his Italy!"

CHAPTER XIV

LESSONS OF THE RING AND THE BOOK

THE best way to find the lessons in a poem is not to look for them. The worst thing a reader can do is to be constantly asking "What does this teach?" He should pursue the course which students of science have found profitable, first trying to know all they could about the phenomena and then allowing the total knowledge to make its impression upon them. When the opposite way was pursued the result was to make nature teach what it was never meant to teach. Progress became possible only when men were willing to learn the actual facts, and to let that knowledge influence them as it would.

So we learn the best lessons of history when we are not set upon learning them. I heard a teacher of history, recently, say that we must pay no attention to any historical event unless it taught some moral principle. Nothing could be more vicious. How do we know what the moral significance of events is until we thor-

oughly know them? and how can we thoroughly know them without careful study of many details which at first sight have no ethical value?

If we seek only for the moral precepts we shall force our moral view into the historic record; we shall become dull moralists, and poor historians. Instead of learning from the facts, we shall always be trying to show what facts are morally valuable. The best historian is the one who sets before his reader a picture of events as they really happened — and who allows the moral that is in them to reveal itself.

Some persons are so absorbed in the moral and spiritual interest of things that their first and almost only interest in a novel or poem is the ethical or religious significance. Browning has suffered much at the hands of such persons. He has been held up as one appointed to give instruction to his age, as one therefore to be studied with a view to moral and religious edification. This is one reason why many people do not read Browning who otherwise might read and love him. They do not feel themselves solemn and serious enough for the effort. "We read poetry," they say, "because we enjoy it." And they are right.

Primarily, the poet is not concerned with moral and religious teaching. He is eager, because he

is a poet, to give a vivid and interesting picture of some facts in human experience. Browning has done this in *The Ring and the Book*. In it he has set forth in terms of beauty and power the incidents in the lives of men and women who stood in more or less intimate relations to one another, and he has unfolded to our view the thoughts and feelings which animated them. But I seriously doubt whether he had consciously determined, in it, to deliver any message to his age. He was first a poet, and afterward, and, by the way, a teacher.

Mr. Berdoe in his *Browning Cyclopædia* represents him as an advocate of the orthodox system of theology, as a modern defender of the "faith once delivered to the saints." Now it is probable that personally Browning was in sympathy with the ideas and beliefs of the Congregationalist Church which he always attended. This is far more likely than that he was the agnostic which Mrs. Sunderland Orr tries to make him. But whatever he was as an individual, he was in his poetry neither an agnostic nor an orthodox believer. He was too much a poet for that. He speaks for his characters, not for himself, and it is difficult to find a poem in which we can feel sure that he utters his own conviction.

In *The Ring and the Book* if we depend upon

single expressions we should be led far out of the way.

Mr. Berdoe thinks he finds a proof of his belief in the miraculous birth of Christ in the words of Pompilia, who, thinking of her child at Christmas time, says:

> "I never realized God's birth before —
> How he grew likest God in being born.
> This time I felt like Mary."

But this is not an expression of what Browning himself thought, but of what Pompilia as a good Catholic must have believed, although before she had not so clearly felt its truth.

Mr. Berdoe might as well have cited Guido's words, at the beginning of Guido's address to the court, "In the name of the indivisible Trinity," as an evidence of Browning's belief in that conception of the divine nature, when it is only a customary formula.

Perhaps the only person in the poem who expresses genuine convictions is the Pope. His estimate of the other characters in the poem is undoubtedly that of the poet himself, and his opinions and reasonings where they deviate from authorized views of the Church must be those of Browning; but where the Pope speaks as a Catholic must be expected to speak, we can lay

no stress upon them as a deliverance of the poet's own conviction.

To get the lessons we must first know the poem as a poem, we must breathe its atmosphere, and then they will come to us without our seeking.

Here it may be said that Browning himself has given the purpose of *The Ring and the Book* in the concluding lines, where he says:

> "So, British Public, who may like me yet,
> (Marry and amen!) learn one lesson hence
> Of many which whatever lives should teach:
> This lesson, that our human speech is naught,
> Our human testimony false, our fame
> And human estimation words and wind."

It may be that Browning thought at the conclusion of his poem that this was one of its important lessons; and so it is. It is a lesson which impresses every attentive reader. One cannot help feeling how hard it is to get at the truth of anything that happens, and how human testimony is moulded in the likeness of our sympathies, our prejudices, and our passions. Things as they appear are often so different from what they are.

But while this is true, I do not believe that Browning began his poem with the conscious purpose of telling this truth "obliquely" in "the

artistic way." Great poems are not written in that manner, and it would not be worth the poet's while to write a poem for such a purpose. That purpose became clear to him as the poem grew, no doubt, but in the same way other lessons of which he never dreamed are suggested to every attentive reader, and come by the way as Browning transforms the dull facts of the "old yellow book" into the ring of poetry.

So we shall be wiser if we read the poem again and again for the pleasure it gives, and allow the lessons in it which come to us without our seeking to make their impression upon us. But we must always remember that the poem was not written for the sake of the lessons in it, but that they are in it as they are in every picture of human experience.

To indicate some of the lessons which have been suggested in my own reading, I find first that religious forms and the good life do not necessarily go together. Guido is the wickedest man in the poem. As we have seen, he has hardly any religious faith. At the last he declares himself to be "a primitive religionist," by which he seems to mean one who follows the promptings of his lower nature. He rejoices in this brutal faith, and yet this is the man who never fails to adopt the conventional usage, the

pious formula. Caponsacchi, who is a priest and a respectable Catholic, disregards all the usages of the society to which he belongs, and breaks the rules of the church by taking Pompilia in his carriage from Arezzo to Rome. In his address to the court he uses none of the formal phrases of piety. What he says is dictated by the passion of the moment. But Guido, who "believes in just the vile of life," begins his defence with the stereotyped orthodox phrase, and has before that taken minor orders in the church; "he clipped his back hair and so far affected Christ." So far as forms and formulas and profession of pious zeal go, he is the most Christian person in the poem. All this reminds us how little these things may have to do with the real life of a man, how little the prevalence of them in a community may reveal of its true character.

We learn from the poem how the existence of Christian institutions may go along with the utter absence of the Christian life. Guido's testimony is not always conclusive, but he is certainly correct when he declares that there is not "a saintly act done in Rome, but might be prompted by the devil." Purest unbelief would do everything that is now being done, as well as the formal belief of the day. All might be heathens, and the appearances of things would remain just

the same. A thorough-going belief in Christianity would revolutionize the conduct of men. We need not, perhaps, lay much stress on all this, were it not for the fact that it is in perfect accord with the solemn thought of the Pope. He declares:

> "All say good words
> To who will hear, all do thereby bad deeds
> To who must undergo."

He reviews his Christian world and discovers that its promise has little to do with its performance. The men around him who are vowed to serve mankind in the light of Christian ideals neglect Pompilia as men without a ray of Christian light might have neglected her. The Archbishop, out of favor to the rank of Guido, throws her back to him again to torture and ruin. The hermit, trained to sacrifice and hardship, promises to write the letter for her, and then, from cowardly fear of the great ones of the place, never does it. The Convertite nuns, vowed to the service of fallen women, are as greedy for gain as any of the worldlings. Those who are trained to render the service which Pompilia needed so much, never do it, while Caponsacchi, who has no special reason for aiding her, does so not because he is a priest but because he is a man. What are all these incidents but an evidence that

the need of the world is not more institutions of Christianity, but more real Christianity. So the power of Christianity, we learn, is not in its formal acknowledgment in statutes and institutions, but in the influence which it exerts upon the daily life and action of man in society, in business, and in politics. It is a very obvious lesson, many times repeated, but one which needs saying or suggesting many times more.

We have also an intimation, in the refusal of Guido to repent, that, to a man who believes in a morality based upon mere considerations of expediency, repentance is illogical. He very clearly states his idea of the origin of the moral law. It is based, he says, upon the agreement made by the whole world, that certain actions which gave great pleasure and profit to ourselves at the expense of others must be declared illegal. So a man must not kill another, merely because it means pleasure or profit to him to do so. Henceforth we must get what we wish through law. Whoever violates this compact forfeits his life. He has done this, and he is ready to pay for it. He is willing to submit to the penalty, but as for repentance, it is nonsense to talk about it.

All this shocks us when we first read it. How wicked and unreasonable it all is! We may pass it over as the raving of a madman. But, as we

dwell upon it, we begin to realize that if we allow his premises we cannot fail to allow his conclusions. If a man believes that morality is something immutable in the nature of things, or that it is an expression of the will of God, then, when he has disobeyed its commands, he will condemn himself for opposing what has a claim to his obedience; he will say "I did wrong" — "against Thee only have I sinned." It will not suffice him to pay the penalty; he must also acknowledge his guilt. But Guido's philosophy of morality recognizes no right beyond the agreement made by man to get along safely with, or to protect himself from, his fellow man. He would refrain from the murder of another not because he sees any sanctity in human life, but because it is not permitted in the social compact and will expose him to death. Such an one has no use for repentance or sorrow for sin, or inward compunction. He does not sin, he runs a risk; he does not repent, he pays a penalty.

So Guido, and those who think with him, commit blunders for which they suffer, but not sins for which they are sorry. All believers in a morality based on expediency must say with him,

> "But, repentance too?
> But pure and simple sorrow for law's breach
> Rather than blunderer's-ineptitude?

Cardinal, no! Abate, scarcely thus!
'T is the fault, not that I dared try a fall
With Law and straightway am found undermost,
But that I failed to see, above man's law,
God's precept you, the Christians, recognize?
Colly my cow!"

Nothing is more common to people in general than the habit of inferring great results from small causes. Something in which for the time being we happen to be interested looms up very large, and we imagine everything must be referred to it. Public speakers, who are aware of this, often find the cause of some event in the prevalence of some notion which has found acceptance, but which has been condemned by those in authority. It is a good way to win the attention of the people, and at the same time the approval of those who have favors to confer. An incident in *The Ring and the Book* shows how this habit of considering the happenings of the day leads one away from real knowledge of them, and away from their real cause.

When the crowd was gathered in the cathedral to view the bodies of Pietro and Violante, placed there near the altar, a Cardinal who had been a friend of Guido entered. A young curate thought this a good opportunity for "improving the event." Some of the hearers expected to learn more about the causes of the murder, the

confession of Pompilia which had been made that morning, and whether the court had "punished anew the gallant Caponsacchi." But not one word of information does our young curate Carlo give nor one word of real interpretation. "He did the murder in a dozen words," and then said that all these outrages were the consequence of the prevalence of Molinism, which he proceeded to discuss and refute. He does this because the Cardinal, who hears him, has written a book on the subject and will be pleased to have his own opinions emphasized. The people think the curate knows what he is about. His business is not to give a right view of the crime that has been committed, but to advance himself.

This all seems ridiculous and shameful, but it is what party orators in state and church, editorial writers, and preachers are doing nearly all the time. The real causes of events are ignored and unreal ones magnified. Things are connected which have no sort of relation with one another. Attention is diverted from what is essential to what is purely superficial. Writers or speakers gain their personal or political or ecclesiastical ends, perhaps, but their readers or hearers are disappointed or misled. Some momentary gain, not truth, is their object. All this finds artistic reprobation in the account of curate

Carlo's discourse and its effect. He spoke over two centuries ago, and he has long since vanished from the earth, but those who follow his example, alas, are only too many.

We learn from other incidents in the poem how unfairly motives are judged. Caponsacchi, as we know, acted from the purest motive, — the desire to save a woman from suffering and death. To get her to her parents in Rome he took her in a carriage and drove without pausing until Pompilia's strength failed her at Castelnuovo. And yet nearly all give his act the worst possible construction. The rabble, of course, take it for granted that he had only an evil intention in his heart. The superior social set in Rome regard him as an offender against the "honor" of Guido as one who was gently dealt with, not because he was innocent, but because he was a priest, and therefore favored by the priests who tried him. Even the judges of the court did not altogether believe his account of his motives. They smiled judicially as he told his story, and shrugged their shoulders as if to say

"The sly one, all this we are bound believe,
Well, he can say no other than what he says.
We have been young too, — come, there 's greater guilt!
Let him but decently disembroil himself,
Scramble from out the scrape nor move the mud, —
We solid ones may risk a finger-stretch!"

It is not until Pompilia and the Pope speak that we see him in the light of his best motive and understand him as he really is. Pompilia reveals how his course was throughout "Purity in quintessence — one dew-drop," and calls him her "soldier-saint."

The Pope sees in him one who deserved the rose of gold, one who did the work in obedience to his heroic impulse which those who were appointed to do it failed to do. Surely here we are taught that there is a "difference in minds," "a difference in eyes that see the minds." The motives imputed in every case reveal the nature of the person who imputes them. To the mean, all motives appear mean; to the commonplace, all motives are commonplace. These are not able to conceive motives that are noble and unusual. Even the shrewd men who know the world know it so well that they never suspect there may be men in it who act on motives that are not worldly. It is only the pure soul of Pompilia, "ermine-like armed from dishonour by its own soft snow," and the Pope, "sensible of fires that more and more visit a soul in passage to the sky," who divine the motive of Caponsacchi and give it due honor and praise.

The way in which those about him judge the motives of the Pope himself in condemning

Guido to death shows again how we suppose others to be swayed by the motives that move ourselves, and therefore how unjust such judgments may be, and often are. We know with what solemn seriousness the Pope decided upon the case of Guido. We know he thought and acted as a man who is conscious that God is viewing every movement of his soul. He judges as one who is willing to be judged by his last judgment. But the outside world knows nothing of all this. It assumes that he determined the execution of Guido because he wished to screen a scandal of the church, or because he was old and liked to have younger men die before himself, or because he hated Austria and had a passion for France.

> "These fairly got the better in the man
> Of justice, prudence, and *esprit de corps*,
> And he persisted in the butchery."

All this may shame us when we remember what reasons we have asserted for the judgments of those of whom we know as little as the people on the streets of Rome knew of the nature of the aged Pope. It is a reminder to us that the motives that usually impel men to act may have had nothing to do with the action we are ready to condemn.

So far I have noticed only the incidental lessons of *The Ring and the Book;* that is, lessons

that suggest themselves in particular passages of the poem. I now wish to call attention to some of the lessons that are implied in its total spirit. One of these is the necessity of a basis for our judgments. The representative characters in "Half-Rome" and "The Other Half-Rome" and "Tertium Quid" readily utter their opinions of the parties involved in the "celebrated murder case." They easily decide in favor of husband or wife, or regard both as unworthy of especial praise or blame. But these never take any evident pains to know why they judge as they do. They are satisfied with the conclusion to which their experience of life, or their feelings, or their class prejudices inevitably lead them. They feel the need of nothing more final than these. In this they are very much like all of us. Every day we express opinions which have nothing to rest upon except our personal bias or the conventional code of conduct and belief.

As for the actors in the poem, — Guido, Caponsacchi, and Pompilia, — they are too much occupied with the statement of the case as it seems to them to think of anything else. Guido is satisfied if he can make his act appear to the judges justifiable in the light of legality and custom. Whether the law or custom rested on a sentiment of real righteousness or not does not concern him. Pom-

pilia unfolds the experience through which she has passed, and expresses the emotions which that experience aroused. Caponsacchi makes it clear to the court that his version of events is the true one. As for the lawyers, they think of nothing else than the flourish of their legal subtleties. Perhaps from these no more ought to be expected, but when we come to the Pope we have a very different way of regarding the whole matter. He solemnly reviews the case and passes his judgment upon all the characters involved in it. He is thoroughly persuaded that he knows them all just as they are. Nothing can be more decided than his tone. We seem to hear in it not so much the voice of a man, as the expression of the law of right. And here we might ordinarily expect him to end. Why does he go on, and why does he delay to sentence Guido and his companions? It is not because he is "irresolute," not because he may by some possibility be mistaken. He declares that his purpose is fixed; and he does not stand on the infallibility of his knowledge, but upon the integrity of his motive. But he still ponders, because he is conscious of a "quick cold thrill," which reminds him that his judgment cannot ultimately rest upon his clear-sightedness which the habit of a lifetime has made keen, but upon the validity of his conception of

the universe. A voice seems to say to him, "Look round thee for the light of the upper sky." He is thus admonished to consider the postulates which must underlie every decision he makes. He is compelled to ask himself upon what grounds his ordinary beliefs depend, and to face the doubts, and give answer to the questionings of his soul.

It may seem strange and unreasonable for the Pope to pursue this course, and in ordinary, actual procedure it would be so. If every time we pronounced a decision upon the conduct and character of those about us, or if every time a judge passed sentence upon a criminal he paused to meditate until he was able to vindicate his ultimate view of things, there would be little time for anything else. Life would be all speculation, and action would be paralyzed. It is probable that the actual Pope, Innocent XII, very properly did not, after he had examined the papers, delay ten minutes to record his conclusion. But in the poem we have an ideal Pope, who is judging in an ideal way. And the way in which he seeks to find solid foundations for his decision impresses us with the lesson which we ought to heed; namely, that every decision we make depends for its character upon our real conviction with regard to God and Nature and man, and their relations to one another.

Here Browning gives an unconscious refutation of the notion which often finds utterance in these times, that it makes no difference what we believe as far as practical life goes. This is true as far as mere superficial and conventional beliefs go. But the real belief of a man determines the character of all that he does and says; it is the most real thing in him. And so it is of the utmost importance that a man should know that his belief is capable of justification in view of his deepest thought.

Another lesson which comes to us in the reading of the poem is that it is the little, almost unnoticed, things by which we are tested. This appears in the relation of the different characters to Pompilia. We are so impressed by the Pope's representation of her essential worth and beauty of soul, and by her own revelation of herself in all her sweetness and purity, that we are apt to lose sight of the fact that she did not appear to those who saw her from day to day "perfect in whiteness." We are much like the artist Maratta, who came to her bedside to sketch her face, exclaiming "a lovelier face is not in Rome." Whereupon another remarks,

> "Mighty fine —
> But nobody cared ask to paint the same,
> Nor grew a poet over hair and eyes
> Four little years ago."

The genius of a great poet has taught us to love and admire her, but those about her saw a girl of "only seventeen." She was a strange young girl in Arezzo, who had been deserted and then disowned by her supposed parents. She was surrounded by those who hated her and sought her ruin. She had no friends, and she was ignorant of the world and of books. Of all the people in the city she seemed of least consequence. But she served to test the lives of those to whom she appealed in her misery for help. The Governor pushed her back to her husband with a "shrug and smile." The Archbishop only scolded her and gave her unfitting advice. The hermit promised to write to her parents after he had heard her piteous story, and never did. To them she seemed only an annoyance. They knew that their lives must be tested, but they never dreamed it would be by their treatment of this poor unfriended girl. One thought it would be in some great emergency of the State, another in some demand of the church, and still another in some great act of sacrifice. But in fact, the test came when it was never expected, and they are judged only by reference to that. All that we know of them now is that they knew her and neglected her. She needed them, and they turned away. If they had only known all that she was and all

that she has become, they would have done otherwise. But as with all of us the crisis came when they were not aware of it, in unsuspected guise. From that hour when they turned her away with indifference and scorn and idle jest they began to sink lower in the scale of being, and they lost the opportunity of their lives.

But Pompilia turned to Caponsacchi, and he recognized her great need, and responded to it, and sacrificed all his hope of the future to it. It mattered not to him that the appeal came in the form of one who had little to commend her to his attention. It was enough for him that when God's command spoke through this insignificant woman he readily obeyed. Through his obedience he rose into a new form of life, where "the very immolation made the bliss." In his short contact with her he learned the lessons which theological formulas and ecclesiastical institutions had never impressed upon him, so that at last he cries, unmindful of "all misapprehending ignorance"

> "— I assuredly did bow, was blessed
> By the revelation of Pompilia."

The blessing which others missed because it offered itself in such humble guise was found by Caponsacchi. He was enabled to realize the profound-

est revelations of God to the soul of man, and to win the homage of all those who prize moral courage and self-sacrifice because he did not turn aside from the humble woman who sought his aid in her extremity.

Connected with this is still another teaching of *The Ring and the Book*. We are apt to imagine that the revelation of God comes to us in the unusual and the striking. Surely, we think, He will make Himself known to us in some mountain amid thunders and smoke and fire. His word will come to us, we imagine, in some book weighty with thought, or in the magnificent ceremonial of the church, or from the lips of some eloquent divine. It has come in this way to many; it may come so to many more. But in *The Ring and the Book* we learn that the choicest revelations of the Spirit come

> "not alone
> In the main current of the general life
> But small experiences of every day,
> Concerns of the particular hearth and home."

and that we learn "not only by a comet's rush, but a rose's birth." The poet does not seek to instruct us through an account of heroic men and women engaged in a mighty struggle in a

far-off time. He tells us of a time not far away, of an episode of only local and momentary importance. The characters conceived have nothing extraordinary about them. The Pope, good and noble as he is, is not one of the great popes of the church. The people concerned in the story pass through no wonderful experiences. And yet the poet reveals through them as much wisdom of life as if he concerned himself with heroic figures and world-famed deeds.

Character is disclosed in the talk of the street and the chatter of the drawing-room. No devil reveals the malignity of evil, but Guido, in the unfolding of the thoughts and feelings of his secret soul, helps us to understand something of the abysmal depths of evil in the human heart. Pompilia is a poor, ignorant girl, but through her short life and humble experience we learn how the character of an angel is formed. Caponsacchi does comparatively little, but in what he does we learn what true manliness is and how the nature is developed through obedience to the divine command. The Pope has only a decision to make, but in making it he causes us to see how solemn a thing a decision is and upon what deep foundation it rests. Pompilia and Caponsacchi are together for three days, and most of that time is passed in the flight from Arezzo to Rome, and

the words spoken are few and simple, yet these come to constitute Caponsacchi's real religion. And thus we are taught that all that is needed for the most effective revelation is the contact of a pure nature with a receptive soul.